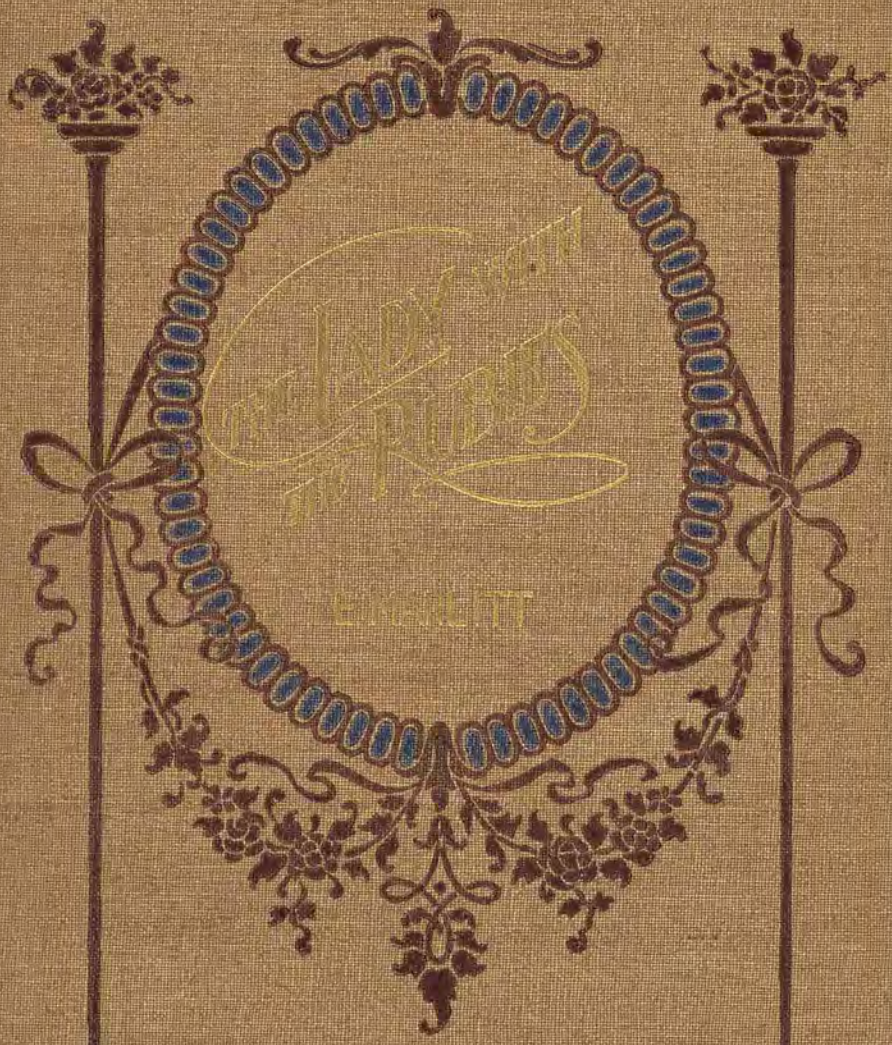
LADY
BURNETT

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THE LADY WITH THE RUBIES

BY

E. MARLITT

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TRANSLATED BY

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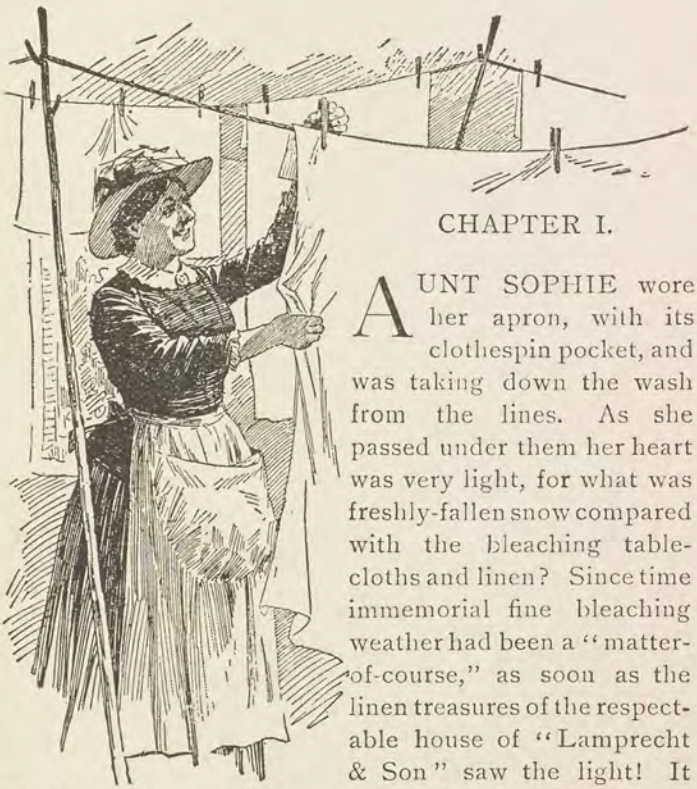
The Lady With the Rubies.



CHAPTER I.

AUNT SOPHIE wore her apron, with its clothespin pocket, and was taking down the wash from the lines. As she passed under them her heart was very light, for what was freshly-fallen snow compared with the bleaching tablecloths and linen? Since time immemorial fine bleaching weather had been a "matter-of-course," as soon as the linen treasures of the respectable house of "Lamprecht & Son" saw the light! It was as much a privilege as the famous "Emperor's weather," said Aunt Sophie, with a sly wink of her eye, for there was someone in the house who did not like to hear such "blasphemy." . . .

Upon this particular day the delightful summer breeze

played among the rows of damp linen, and the July sun seemed to concentrate its entire strength in the large quadrangle of the court. Flocks of swallows, like metallic darts, flew over the roofs into the yard; their nests were built on the stone cornices in the *bel-étage* of the eastern side-wing, and there was no one there to disturb the tiny bluecoats when they rested on the cornices and kept up a continual twitter.

No, they were neither disturbed by the sight of a human being nor by a forbidding wave of the hand; for the windows in the wing were opened at the most but once a year, and then only for a few hours; after which the curtains with their large flowers were again drawn, and the sun was allowed to fade the last remnant of color out of the rotten silken fibre.

The main-building, whose facade looked upon the finest square in the city, had apartments and halls in abundance, the occupants were few, and so the upper suite of rooms in the eastern wing were not used. But people gainsaid this. Although the addition was flooded with sunlight and brightness, and looked so peaceful with its high, deserted windows, it was, nevertheless, the scene of a struggle, a continued, ghostlike struggle. So said the people without in the streets and lanes, and those within did not deny it. Why should they? Since the year 1795, when beautiful Frau Dorothea Lamprecht was confined and died in this side-wing, there had not been a servant of the family who had not once at least seen the long train of a white nightrobe sweep through the corridor, or who had not been compelled, half dead with fright, to lean against the wall of the passage in order to allow the tall, thin "deceased" in the gray weblike gown to pass by. Therefore, said the people, no one slept upstairs.

Perjury was said to be the cause of the "apparition."

Justus Lamprecht, the great-grandfather of the head of the house at this time, had had to solemnly swear to his dying spouse, Frau Judith, that she should have no successor—she had said it was for the sake of her two boys; but in reality it was burning jealousy which grudged to another the place by the side of her husband. Herr Justus, however, had an inflammable heart, and so had his handsome ward, who lived in his house. She said, even should she have to go to perdition with him, she would not give him up, and would wed him in spite of his jealous former wife. They lived together like two turtledoves, until one day beautiful, young Frau Dorothea retired to the side-wing, there in the apartment furnished for the occasion with princely magnificence to give birth to a daughter. Herr Justus Lamprecht now said his happiness was complete.

The winter was a severe one, and on Christmas night, when the cold without was intense, on the stroke of twelve the doors of the room leading into the corridor were slowly and solemnly opened, and the deceased entered upon a gray cloud, as if wrapped in cobwebs. And the cloud, the cobweb mantle, and the hideous head with its lace cap, were all thrust under the silken canopy and weighed down as heavily upon the occupant of the couch as if the blooming young wife's heart's blood were to be drained. The nurse was paralyzed with fear and chilled by the icy atmosphere given out by the apparition; she lost consciousness, and only after the lapse of sometime, when the newly-born babe cried, did she come to.

Ah, that was a fine state of affairs! The door leading into the icy corridor was wide open, and not a trace of wicked Frau Judith was to be seen, but erect in her bed sat Frau Dorothea, with chattering teeth, shivering and looking in a dazed manner at her babe in its cradle; immediately thereafter she became delirious, and five days afterwards,

she lay in her coffin, her dead infant in her arms. The doctor said that mother and child had died in consequence of a severe cold; the careless nurse had not closed the door properly, had fallen asleep and had dreamed—nonsense! If all was natural, wherefore did the lovely temptress so frequently flit at twilight out of her former chamber, followed by the gray Fury, who tried to twine her long, thin arms around her neck?

At the end of the last century the firm of "Lamprecht & Son" had dealt in linen, and the frequently repeated designation "Thuringian Fuggers" was not unsuited to their position. At this time their large warehouse on the market resembled a bee-hive, there were so many people. Up to the very roof the bales of linen were piled, and every week enormous wagons, heavily-laden, carried the goods out into the world. Aunt Sophie knew all about this. Of course, she herself had not lived in those days; but family traditions, old business, and diary memoranda, and various, often curious bequests were registered in her brain as promptly as the royal keeper of the archives would collect them in the annals.

The annual July bleaching was a time of reminiscences. Old pieces of linen were then hung upon the line, not to be made use of—heaven forbid!—only that they might not turn yellow, and that they might be laid in fresh folds. Probably the huntsman and Amazons woven into the linen, the amythological and biblical figures in the damask, were surprised each time to find the court so quiet and so different, not to hear a word about the price of flax and cost of weaving, not to hear the wagons, with their piles of freight, rumble through the arched gateway of the packing-house, and to find the looms silent. To be sure, there was occasionally a murmur and a rustle in the court, but the noise was made by the breeze which came through the

bushes and branches—good Lord, how the world changes! Green foliage upon the *ci-devant* business square, where at that period not the tiniest blade of grass peeped from between the layers of pebbles! Even the old stone pavement could not hold its own in the course of time! A thick carpet of grass now lay upon the somewhat sloping ground, beautiful rosebushes shed their gaily-colored petals upon the soft grass; a wealth of green elm-trees nodded in front of the western side-wing, the so-called weaving-manufactory, and the old warehouse, which defined the court on the north, was entwined from top to bottom with the green coat-of-mail of the Spanish elder.

The linen trade had long since been exchanged for a porcelain factory, which was outside the city, in the village of Dambach.

The present head of the house of "Lamprecht & Son" was a widower. He had two children, and Aunt Sophie, the last of a side-line of the family, kept his house, with industrious hands, in an orderly manner, with prudent economy. And the merry aunt, with her large nose and clever brown eyes, thought it the most sensible act of her life that she had remained an old maid, because then a real Lamprecht physiognomy could look out of the housekeeper's room upon the market-place. This expression grated upon the ear of the "Frau Amtsratin," as much as did the standing remark about the Emperor's weather; but the "Frau Amtsratin" was a very fine lady, who went to court, and Aunt Sophie always assumed the most innocent air, so there was never any quarrel between them.

"Amtsrats," Herr Lamprecht's father and mother-in-law, lived in the second story of the main building. The old gentleman had rented his beautiful manor and retired from business, but he could not stand it long in the city. He left wife and son—his only one—alone quiet frequently and

visited Dambach, where he could be near the woods and the hare-coverts, and where he could remain as long as he liked in his son-in-law's roomy pavilion belonging to the factory.

The clock in the town-hall tower struck four; and the work of bleaching neared its end with the hour of afternoon coffee. The wash was piled white and high as a snow-hill in the enormous baskets, and Aunt Sophie carefully took the clothespins from the costly antiquities. Suddenly her breast gave a bound.

"A fine business!" she said, in a tone of surprise and perplexity, to the old servant who was helping her. "See here, Barbe! The tablecloth with the marriage at Cana is flatted out—it has a great tear in it!"

"It is old enough, too—pure tinder-rags! Everything has its day, Fraulein Sophie!"

"How clever you are, old, shrewd Barbe! I know that sentence by heart, too. The tear is right across the steward's face—I shall have trouble enough to darn it." She held the thin texture up to the light. "It is surely an old heirloom! Frau Judith brought this cloth into the family."

Barbe cleared her throat loudly and cast a covert glance at the windows of the eastern side-wing. "Such people, who cannot rest in the grave, should not be named so loudly, Fraulein Sophie!" she reproved in a hushed voice, and with a decided, condemnatory shake of her head. "Certainly not at the very time, when they are walking again—the coachman saw her last night, dressed in white, turn the corner of the corridor."

"In white? Well, then she did not wear the cobweb-like cloak. . . . So the stout coachman poses as the highly gifted person in your servants' hall? The master should know about that! You cowards probably want to

bring his house once more into everyone's mouth?" She shrugged her shoulders and folded the tablecloth. "I, for my part, am perfectly indifferent to it. It does not sound badly for people to say: 'The white lady in Lamprecht's house!' The Lamprechts are an ancient and honorable family! We may have *this* luxury as well as those at the castle."

These last words were evidently not addressed to the maid. Aunt Sophie's merry brown eyes were turned in the direction of the group of elms before the weaving factory. There gleamed a pair of spectacles on "Frau Amtsratin's" nose. The old lady had brought her parrot out of doors for an airing, and was guarding him against the attacks of the cat. She was embroidering, and beside her at the white garden-table, sat her grandson, little Reinhold Lamprecht, writing on his slate.

"I hope you do not mean that seriously, my dearest Sophie!" said the old lady; a slight flush overspread her face, and her eyes looked sharply over her spectacles. "Moreover, one should not make sport of such sacred privileges; it is improper—stricter people than I would say 'democratic!'"

"Ah, yes, that would be just like them!" laughed Aunt Sophie. "Those are the ones who would like again to brandish fire and sword in the world! But must one be a democrat if one does not creep on the ground like a worm? There is surely no difference in those who come back to scare the living out of their wits, and the white lady of the castle has first to rise from the mouldy ground just as does great-grandfather Justus' pretty Dorchen!"

The old lady turned up her delicate little nose, and maintained an indignant silence. She laid down her embroidery hoop and approached Barbe.

"What is this—did the coachman say he saw some-

thing in the corridor last night, too?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, madame, and he has not recovered from the fright yet. He was in the upper rooms until dusk waxing the floors, and afterwards on going down it seemed to him as if a door was softly closed in the corridor—in the corridor, ma'am, where a door-key is never turned! Well, to be brief, the cold chills run down his back and his legs grew as heavy as lead; but his courage did not forsake him, he stepped aside and peeped around the corner. And there before his eyes in the corridor flitted a form quite slender, tall and in white from head to foot."

"Do not forget the black kid-gloves, Barbe!" interpolated Aunt Sophie.

"God forbid, Fraulein Sophie, the monster had not a black thread on it! And as it turned the other corner, it all desolved like a mist and disappeared, the coachman says, like smoke in the wind. Ten horses could not drag him into the corridor again at dusk!"

"The brave fellow will not be asked to go there—he should be in an old woman's home with his spinning-room gossip!" said Aunt Sophie, half-amused, half-vexed, reaching up to take a napkin from the line; but at that moment she turned her head. "Zounds! What sort of a vehicle is coming here! Ah, Gretel, are you mad?"

Into the court through the arched gateway rolled a handsome landau, built for a child's use, with a span of two goats. The driver, a girl of about nine years of age, was standing up and holding the reins tightly in her hands. Her round, broad-brimmed straw hat had fallen back upon her neck, and, held in place by the strings, waved like a yellow disk behind the dark curls which floated wildly in the breeze.

The carriage bowled under the elms, beneath which sat little Reinhold, then only with a jerk did it come to a halt,

to the terror of the parrot, which screeched loudly, while the boy slid from the bench.

"Why, Grete, you must not drive my goats! I will not have it!" scolded Reinhold, in a peevish voice, his thin, pale little face flushing with anger. "They are my goats! Papa gave them to me!"

"I will not do it, surely not, darling!" assured his sister, leaping from the carriage. "Come, do not be vexed! Do you still love me?" The boy again climbed upon his seat and impatiently suffered his sister's stormy caress. "You see, Hans and Benjamin want to have their fun, too! The poor things have been shut up in the Dambach stable so long."

"And did you really drive in alone from Dambach?" asked the "Frau Amtsratin," indignation and affright in her gentle voice.

"Of course, grandmama! The stout coachman cannot sit behind me in the childrens' carriage? Papa rode home, and I was to drive in in the large carriage with the fore-woman, but they dawdled too long for me."

"What nonsense! And your grandfather?"

"He stood in the courtyard gate, laughing and holding his sides as I rushed by."

"Yes, you and grandfather! To me you are"—the old lady wisely swollowed the rest of her sharp speech, and angrily pointed her finger at her granddaughter's form. "How you look! Did you drive through town like this?"

Little Margarete tugged at the ribbons about her neck in order to rid herself of her hat, and ran her hand over the embroidered front of her white dress with an indifferent glance. "Bilberry stains!" said she, deliberately. "It serves you right, why do you always put white dresses on me! Barbe says packing-canvas would be the best for me."

Aunt Sophie laughed, and a man's voice joined in the laughter. Almost simultaneously with the arrival of the tiny equipage a young man entered the court, a strikingly handsome youth of nineteen, the "Frau Amtsratin's" son

and her only child, for she was her husband's second wife, and the deceased Frau Lamprecht's stepmother. The young man had several books under his arm for he had just come from the gymnasium.

The little girl cast an angry glance at him. "You need not laugh, Herbert!" she grumbled in an offended tone, as she again took up the reins in order to take the vehicle to the stable.

"Is that so? I will remember that, my little lady! But may I ask how your school-work is progressing? It is scarcely probable that the gracious Fraulein repeated her French lesson while eating blueberries, and I should like to know how many blots your copy-book will show this evening when the exercise will have to be written by steam——"

"None! I will be careful—just to spite you, Herbert!"

"How often must I repeat to you, naughty child, that you must not say 'Herbert,' but 'Uncle,'" chided the "Frau Amtsratin."

"Ah, grandmama, it cannot be, and were he ten times over papa's brother-in-law!" replied the girl, angrily, shaking her dark locks from her face with all the symptoms of impatience. "Real uncles should be old. I remember quite clearly when Herbert drove goats and broke the windows with balls and stones. The doctor, too, forbade his eating fruit, yet he secretly ate plums by the handful out of his pocket—ah, yes, I remember it very well! And now he is nothing more than a pedant who goes about with books under his arm. Brr, Hans! Will you wait!" she scolded the impatient team, grasping the reins tighter.

At this loud-spoken, unreserved criticism from a childish mouth the young man turned scarlet. He forced a smile. "You saucy girl, you need the rod!" he muttered between

his teeth, while his disconcerted glance was turned in the direction of the warehouse opposite.

The slanting wooden gallery which extended along the upper floor before the sash-windows of this old house, was, too, covered with the network of the Spanish elder foliage. In green niche there was sometimes a faint golden glimmer, and occasionally a delicate, white hand was raised behind the balustrade, as if to dreamily stroke the wavy golden hair, or to bury itself within it. . . . But at this moment all was silent there.

The "Frau Amtsratin" was the only one who had noticed her son's covert glance. She said not a word, but her brow contracted as she turned her back to the warehouse.

"Dearest Sophie, my son is right—Gretchen grows daily more unmannerly!" said she to Aunt Sophie, with evident irritation, taking her parrot's perch in order to carry it upstairs. "I do all in my power whenever the child is upstairs with me, but of what avail is it, if downstairs you laugh at her rudeness? At Gretchen's age our Fanny was a perfect lady; from a little child she was remarkably *chic* and tactful. What would she say could she see her child growing up so wild and unbridled, were she to hear the blunt manner in which the girl is in the habit of speaking? I doubt if anything can be done with such a head!"

"It is as hard as wood, Frau Amtsratin! To be sure it is difficult to make an impression on it," replied Aunt Sophie, with a humorous smile. "At real rudeness I never laugh—you may rest assured of that! But our Gretel does not annoy me with that . . . with courtesies and bows it might prove difficult. I readily believe that; and I cannot help with that, for I am not in the world. I only attend to these things—that the harum-scarum may retain her love of truth, that the child may not learn to dissemble, to

flatter and to say pretty things in which she herself does not believe."

Meanwhile little Margarete, who had started angrily at the word "rod," as if she already felt its sting, had, with Barbe's assistance, brought the vehicle under shelter, and Reinhold was showing his young uncle his exercises on his slate.

The boy was very delicately built, with a slender form, and languid in his movements.

"There is an excess of strength in Gretel which must out!" continued Aunt Sophie. "I wish our quiet, pale little fellow there"—she pointed to the boy, and her eyes clouded—"had part of it."

"I have my opinion of so-called people of strength, my dear!" replied the Frau Amtsratin, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I prefer distinguished repose to anything else! We have again recurred to the old subject of Reinhold's constitutional delicacy—if you knew how you irritated me with this eternal seeing of ghosts! My God, Lamprecht's only hope, his treasure! No, thank the Lord, our boy is perfectly healthy! The doctor assures us of this, and I do not doubt that later on Reinhold will not be behind his father in strength and activity!"

This assertion seemed very bold when one compared the miserable little human plant at the garden-table with the man who at this moment rode into the courtyard.

Herr Lamprecht came from a different direction from that taken by his daughter, he rode through the street behind his estate, a street which once had been the main road of the wagon laden with linen. Of late he had generally chosen this road.

The horseman's form, which emerged from the darkness of the deep gateway of the warehouse, was imposing indeed. Herr Lamprecht was a remarkably handsome

man, slender, erect and dark-bearded, full of fire and dignity in both bearing and gestures.

"Papa, here I am! Fully ten minutes sooner than you.

"Yes, the goats run differently from your Lucifer, their speed is wonderful!" rejoiced Margarete, who at the sound of the horse's hoofs upon the pavement came hastily out of the stable door.

The noise of the opening door below caused a movement in the green niche of the wooden balcony, which was directly over the entrance—the fair head appeared. Perhaps the green of the overhanging leaves and the wall of the house behind darkened with age were especial foils and doubly enhanced the Mayflower freshness of the youthful face; at any rate, the young girl in the light summer dress was sufficient to attract all eyes toward her.

Curiously, it seemed, she leaned over the bower; as she did so two thick plaits fell forward and hung over the balustrade, so that the breeze fluttered the blue ribbons to and fro at the ends of them.

Flowers must have still been laying upon the balustrade; at the girl's hasty movement, a couple of beautiful roses fell over and alighted upon the pavement at the horse's hoofs. The animal shied; but his rider soothingly patted his neck and rode into the courtyard. With strangely fixed eyes, which seemed to look neither to the right nor the left, as he passed he raised his hat; he rode heedlessly over the flowers and did not once glance up at the open gallery from whence came the fragrant blossoms. Herr Lamprecht was a proud man, and "Frau Amtsratin" knew that he paid little heed to the occupants of the rear house.

On the other hand his little daughter seemed to think differently. She ran up to the warehouse and picked up the flowers. "Are you twining a wreath, Fraulein Lenz?" she called up to the gallery. "A couple of roses fell down—shall I throw them up to you or bring them up? Eh?"

No reply came. The young girl had disappeared; probably frightened at the shying of the the animal, she had fled into the interior of the house.

Meanwhile Herr Lamprecht alighted from his horse. He was near enough to hear his mother-in-law say with disapproving surprise to Aunt Sophie: "How does Gretchen happen to be so intimate with the people over there?"

"Intimate? I know nothing of it. I do not think the child has ever mounted the stairs in the warehouse. It is nothing but her kind heart, Frau Amtsratin! Gretel is kind to everyone; that is true politeness and a disposition a thousand times more preferable, in my opinion, than that of those who to all appearances are so complimentary, and in their hearts have harsh thoughts of others. . . . It may too be but a child's delight in beauty—I am no better!

My heart always feels light, when I see the lovely maiden in the gallery."

"A matter of taste!" interpolated the "Amtsratin," in a low voice, but her brow contracted angrily, and a dark, sidelong glance was cast upon her son, who was bending over Reinhold's slate. "I never admired blondes," she added, in her voice always so soft and low. "However, I surely have no fault to find with Gretchen for being polite; it surprises and pleases me that she can *be* so. Neither do I belong to 'those' who in their hearts have harsh thoughts of others, dearest—not at all; for that I am too mild and Christianlike! But I am firm in my good, conservative views, according to which certain limits must be absolutely observed . . . with all respect to the young girl—who has been a governess in England, and has attained a higher grade of education—I maintain nevertheless; this girl is and remains here only the daughter of the man who runs the factory, and that means a restriction for us all—am I not right, Balduin?" She turned to her son-in-law, who seemed to be examining his horse's saddle and bridle.

He scarcely raised his head, but a furtive glance shot sideways out of his dark, glowing eyes, a glance as hasty and sharp as if he wished to reduce the delicate, gentle woman to dust and ashes. She had to wait one brief moment for the confirmation of her inquiry, but then it came promptly and indifferently from the lips of the handsome man: "You are always right, mamma? Who would make so bold as to be of another opinion?"

He pushed his hat further over his eyes, and led his horse towards the stable.

CHAPTER II.

MEANWHILE under the elms there was quite a commotion. Margarete had laid the roses she had picked up, upon the garden-table—only until Fraulein Lenz should come out again on the porch, she said, kneeling on the seat beside her young brother.

"See here, Grete!" said Herbert, pointing to the slate. He was still flushed, and his voice sounded strangely uncertain and suppressed—probably from vexation, thought the little girl. "See here," he repeated, "are you not ashamed! Reinhold is almost two years your junior, and how beautiful and correct his writing is compared with your characters, which are as horribly large and stiff as if they were written with a piece of wood and not with a pen!"

"But they are plain," replied the little girl—"so beautifully plain, Barbe says, that she does not even have to put on her spectacles as she does when she reads the hymn-book. Why should I bother myself with those stupid flourishes?"

"Well, I might have known that—you are an incorrigible, lazy little girl!" said the young man, absently picking up one of the roses and inhaling its perfume—but he seemed to do this only with his lips.

"Yes, I am sometimes lazy in school, that is true!" assented the girl; "but not in history—only in arithmetic and——"

"And in your school-work at home, as your teacher complains——"

"Ah, what does he know? An old man like that, who

takes snuff and sticks in school and his narrow, miserable street — no sun shines in, and his room is as full of tobacco smoke as a chimney — he knows much how one feels when one is lying in the grass in the Dambach garden, and —here, that won't do! That cannot be stolen!" she interrupted herself, throwing her lissom form quickly across the table and snatching at the rose, which Herbert, possibly in consequence of his absence of mind, had just put in his breast-pocket.

But the usually so self-possessed young man was scarcely recognizable at this moment. Quite pale, his eyes full of anger, he seized the tiny hand before it touched him, and flung it from him as if it were some poisonous insect.

The child uttered a cry of pain, and Reinhold sprang from the seat in affright.

"Helloa! What is going on here?" asked Herr Lamprecht, approaching the table, having given his horse into the care of the servant who had come forward.

"He shall not! That is the same as stealing!" gasped little Margarete, still under the influence of fear.

"The roses belong to Fraulein Lenz——"

"Well, and——"

"Herbert has taken a white one and put it in his pocket —the very prettiest of all!"

"Childishness!" chided Frau Amtsratin. "What absurd fun, Herbert!"

Herr Lamprecht looked overheated, as if his ride had driven all the blood to his head. He drew nearer the young man in silence, and swung his ridingwhip in his hand, and gradually a superior, insulting, mocking smile began to hover about his lips; he contracted his brows and measured his youthful *vis-a-vis* from head to foot, and it seemed as if sparks were transmitted from the leather whip to the face of the young man, who colored deeply.

"Leave him alone, little one!" said Herr Lamprecht finally to his daughter, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Herbert needs the stolen property in school—he has to produce a *rosa alba* tomorrow at the lesson in botany."

"Balduin!" The young man's voice was stifled, as if a hand were clutching his throat.

"What is it, my boy?" said Herr Lamprecht, with ironical assiduity. "Am I not right in maintaining that the best scholar, the most ambitious student who ever sat upon a school-bench, will have no other thought just previous to his final examination than the thought of his school? Come, do not drudge so! You have grown quite hollow eyed of late, and your plump, boyish face is losing its color; but our future minister—you know, every minister nowadays—needs nerves of steel and a considerable quantity of iron in his blood."

He laughed mockingly, patted the youth's shoulder and walked away.

"A word with you, Balduin!" Frau Amtsratin called after him, picking up her beloved parrot's perch.

Herr Lamprecht paused dutifully, although he looked as impatient as if the ground were burning his feet. He took from his mother-in-law the bird, in order to carry it, and meanwhile Herbert rushed madly past them into the house, and the stone-steps rang beneath his wild steps as he hastily ascended them. . . .

"It serves Herbert right!" murmured Margarete, angrily striking her hand upon the table. "I do not believe it! Papa was only joking. Herbert has probably to take the professor a rose! Nonsense!"

She gathered together the remaining flowers, tied the stems with her silk hair-ribbon and ran towards the warehouse in order to throw the small bouquet over the balustrade. It alighted on the ledge, no one reached for it, not a trace of the light summer gown was to be seen, much less did the soft, sweet, girlish voice, "to which one so gladly listened," speak its thanks from the gallery. Disappointed, the little maid again sought the shade of the elms.

The courtyard was quiet. Aunt Sophie and Barbe had taken the last pieces of wash from the line, and had carried the heaped-up baskets into the house; after having closed the stable-door the servant had gone out to attend to some errands, and the silent little boy again sat on the bench, drawing with enviable patience his much-praised letters upon the slate.

Margarete sat down by his side, and folded her small, thin, sunburnt hands in her lap; she let her restless feet dangle, and with her bright, clever eyes followed the flight of the swallows as they flew over the roofs and in sharp curves pierced the blue ether, to disappear under the projecting cornices of the side-wing opposite.

Meanwhile Barbe arrived with a duster; she ran it over the garden table, put on a tea-cloth and the cups and

saucers; then she began to roll up the washline. From time to time she cast an angry glance at the child, whose eyes were fixed so carelessly upon the upper row of windows of the haunted house; to the old cook this was a bold challenge, which made her shudder.

"Barbe, Barbe, quick, turn around! Someone is within!" suddenly exclaimed the girl, pointing her finger directly at one of the windows in Frau Dorothea's former apartment, and as she spoke she sprang from the seat.

Involuntarily, as if impelled by some foreign power, Barbe turned her head in the direction indicated, and in affright dropped the enormous bundle of line. "Lord, the curtain is moving!" she murmured.

"Nonsense, Barbe! If it were but moving that would be nothing at all; that might, too, have been the breeze!" said Margarete, with conviction. "No, it was right in the

centre"—she again pointed to the window—"it was opened there, and someone looked out; but that is absurd—not a soul lives there——"

"For God's sake, child, who would point his finger over there constantly!" whispered Barbe, seizing the tiny hand in order to put it down. She had stepped in front of the children, as if she wished to cover them with her broad figure, and turned her back upon the window indicated—at no price would she have glanced that way again. "You see, Gretchen, that is what you get for your everlasting staring over there! I wanted to speak to you about it before, but you are always offended right away, so I kept still. . . . For such things as the windows up there, one must have no eyes."

"Superstitious old Barbe—Aunt Sophie should hear that!" reproved the girl, attempting to push the clumsy old woman out of the way. "One should look over there! I want to know who it was! The first time it walked too quickly—sh, it was gone again! But I believe it was grandmama's housemaid, she has such a white brow——"

"She?" It was now the rebuked cook's turn to assume an air of conviction. "In the first place, how would she come to be in the chamber? She could surely not creep through the keyhole? And in the second place, she would not do it—not for the world, Gretchen! The venturesome creature did just as you did—she thought, too, she could not be mistaken, so the night before last at dusk she had her share of fright, just as the coachman had his yesterday. . . . Go rather upstairs to the good chamber with the red hangings, where are the old portraits—it is the one with the rubies in her coal-black hair! She cannot rest in the ground, so she flits about the house and scares people."

"Barbe, aunt says you must not talk such nonsense to us children!" cried Margarete, angrily, stamping her foot,

"do you not see how frightened Holdchen is?" With the comforting air of a grandmother, she put her arms around the neck of the boy, who was listening with terrified, staring eyes. "Come here, you poor little fellow, do not be afraid, and do not let silly Barbe deceive you! There are no ghosts—none at all! That is all nonsense!"

At this moment Aunt Sophie stepped out of the house. She brought the coffee, and placed a large sugar-powdered cake on the table. "Child, Gretel, you look like a litigious rooster! What is the matter again?" she asked, while Barbe hastily decamped, and took up her clothesline.

"Someone was in the room there," answered the little girl, curtly, pointing to the window.

Aunt Sophie, who was just cutting the cake, paused. She turned her head and glanced cursorily at the row of windows. "Up there?" she asked, half-laughing. "You are dreaming in the daytime, child!"

"No, aunt, it was really a person! Just there, where the curtain is so red, it opened. I saw the fingers, white fingers, push it, and only in passing did I see, too, a brow with light hair——"

"The sun, Gretel, nothing else!" replied Aunt Sophie imperturbably, proceeding with the cutting of her cake. "It plays and reflects in all colors upon the cold, weather-beaten panes, and that is deceptive. Had I the key you would have to go with me on the spot to the room, in order that I might convince you that not a soul was therein, and then we should see who was right, you little goose! But your papa has the key, and grandmama is with him now; I do not want to disturb them."

"Barbe says the lady whose portrait hangs in the red *salon* looked out—that she goes about the house, aunt, and wants to frighten everyone," complained Reinhold, in a whimpering, fearful tone.

"Ah, is that so!" said Aunt Sophie. She laid down the knife and glanced over her shoulder at the old cook, who was rolling up her line. "You are a treasure, Barbe—a genuine Madame Doleful and funeral toad! . . . What has the poor woman in the red *salon* done to you that you should make her a bug-bear to her great-grandchildren?"

"Ah, there is no fear of a bug-bear, Fraulein Sophie!" replied Barbe defiantly, without raising her eyes from her work. "Gretchen does not believe it. . . . That is the trouble today! Children come into the world so over-wise, that they want to believe in nothing that they cannot lay hands upon." She went on rolling her line with such extreme zeal as if it were a question of strangling all the little unbelievers. "But if mortal man no longer believe in ghost and witch stories, our Lord will, too, be a loser—and that is the impiety of today, that I maintain!"

"You may maintain what you like, but in the future you will kindly leave our children out of the game," ordered Aunt Sophie severely. She poured out the childrens' coffee and gave them some cake, then she went to disengage a rosebush from the clothesline, which had become entangled in its branches owing to Barbe's violence.

"It was not the sun—that is certain! I will find out yet who is always flitting through the corridor and creeping into the room!" murmured the little skeptic at the coffee-table, breaking her cake into her cup.

CHAPTER III.

"A WORD with you, Balduin!" Frau Amtsratin had said, and since Herr Lamprecht had the honor of being her son-in-law, her wishes were always respected by him as laws. It was so today, too. To be sure there was a frown of impatience upon his brow, and he would have preferred to have strangled the spoilt parrot which protested against its unwilling bearer; Frau Amtsratin did not notice this in the least, and very opportunely a housemaid coming from the upper floor took the bird and carried him upstairs.

So the dainty, delicate little lady walked unsuspectingly and gracefully beside her son-in-law; the lace ends of her cap fluttered in the breeze, and her short train of dark silk rustled aristocratically over the steps. These broad sandstone steps were considerably worn. For more than two centuries these steps had been used—they had witnessed all the family joys and sorrows. Marriages, christenings, balls and dinners, as well as the last rites—everything that concerned the heads and hearts of the past generations, and only the footprints remained. Now the dainty old lady with her tiny slippers, too, climbed step after step, to ease her heart when up above of its oppression—dejection and care were imprinted plainly enough upon her features.

Herr Lamprecht's private apartment close by the staircase, was at the end of the long suite of rooms in the middle *étage*. Behind these rooms, looking in the direction of the court, was the corridor or hall, as it was called in the house, bespeaking by its length and breadth the prodigality of space in the olden time. It ended only at

the last room, the so-called red drawing-room; there it turned the corner of the added eastern side-wing and narrowed into the dusky passage back of Frau Dorothea's room, in which the light only entered from the most extreme opposite corner, where a few steps led at the side into the warehouse through a window very high up.

In the hall stood antique tables, artistically carved, and against the rear wall, between the folding-doors leading out of the rooms, were arranged chairs, over whose seats and upholstered backs was the same yellow velvet which one of the old merchants had formerly brought with him from the Netherlands. . . . Here many a minuet had been danced, many a banquet had been given, and ugly Frau Judith, with her lace cap, and the seductive young wife with the rubies in her hair, could today without difficulty be pictured as mistresses of the old French appointments. But although much, both in the rooms and the halls within, bespoke the pomp of his ancestors, at the apartments of the present owner this ceased, and modern luxury held sway.

It was rather a lady's boudoir than a man's room into which Herr Lamprecht ushered his mother-in-law. Rose-wood and silk, water-colors and a soft pink light given out by hangings and upholstery—this delicate *ensemble* formed one of those dainty nests in which one fancies a pretty, young wife cosily nestling—and here indeed had Herr Lamprecht's deceased wife lived.

Frau Amtsratin walked toward one of the small easy-chairs, which, half-buried in the folds of silk and lace of the curtains, filled the deep window-niches. She was rarely reminded in this room of her daughter who had once ruled here; she was accustomed to seeing her son-in-law sit at the little writing-desk and use all the dainty appointments. Being a man of strong passions, after his young

wife's death he had retired to this spot in his first grief, and since then the tiny room had remained his sanctum.

"Ah, how charming!" cried the old lady, pausing as if chained to the spot before the writing-desk, beside which she was on the point of seating herself. It was charming indeed, the painting in water-colors upon the medallion of a portfolio—a transparent network of delicate ferns, and behind it, as if shut in, a bit of woodland vegetation and life. "An original idea, and how clearly executed!" added

Frau Amtsratin, calling her *lorgnette* to her aid. "See this tiny sprite as it reaches over from its bluebell shrine toward the strawberry . . . truly quite delightful! . . . The work of a lovely woman's hand, Balduin? Am I right?"

"Possibly!" said he, with a shrug of his shoulders and a cursory glance at the portfolio, busying himself with straightening a picture hanging rather crooked on the wall. "This industry today gives employment to a whole army of ladies——"

"Then it was not especially designed for you?"

"For me?" The tiny nail, which should have held the picture in place, fell out—the tall, stately man bent over to seek it on the carpet, and when he stood up again, bending over had driven all the blood to his head. . . . "Dear mama, are you really ignorant of the prime factor in our modern life, selfishness, and do you really believe that anyone nowadays does anything for nothing, without the least hope of result?"

He said this, his head still averted, as he sought to again drive the nail into the wall. Now he looked the old lady full in the face—about his mouth lurked a bitter, mocking expression. "Let us call to mind all the beautiful hands of the ladies of our circle, and tell me which of them would execute such an artistic piece of work, and one which requires so much patience for a man who—is not in the market!"

He walked to the other window, while the old lady nestled in her small, soft easy-chair. "You are probably in the right there!" said she, with a smile, and in the tone of indifference assumed by those who assent to something long since established and indisputable. "It is a well-known fact in the town that our poor, dear Fanny took with her to the grave your promise of eternal fidelity.

Only the night before last was it the subject of conversation at court. The Duchess was speaking of the time when my poor daughter still lived and was a much envied woman, and the Duke said one should not be always extolling the so-called good old time, with its integrity, and contrasting it with the present; for example, worthy old Justus Lamprecht, who was almost feared for his austerity, had in his youth broken an oath of fidelity, while his great-grandson was putting him to shame by his noble constancy."

Herr Lamprecht had disappeared behind the red curtian. His hands were resting upon the windowledge, and he was looking beyond the fountain on the market-place at the street opposite. The man had a remarkable face. Pride, or rather haughtiness, so strongly marked, would have lent any other face a stony look; but here fiery blood had a subduing effect. It caused the eyes to sparkle in untamable anger, a soft, yearning smile to play irresistibly about his lips, it drove the flush of anger to his brow and breathed the pallor of mortal pain into his cheeks. But now, at the old lady's last words, Herr Lamprecht cast down his eyes. He looked as if he had entirely lost the props of his soul, proud assurance, manly defiance, the consciousness of rich possession for a moment—almost like a rebuked and shamefaced schoolboy he stood there, his dark head bowed low, biting his lips.

"Well, Balduin!" cried Frau Amtsratin, looking keenly in his direction, for all was so quiet in the window-niche. "Are you not pleased that they have so flattering an opinion of you at court?"

The rustling of the silken curtains was lost in the deep sigh which passed his lips, as he stepped back into the room. "The Duke seems to admire this noble quality in others more than in himself—he has a second wife!" said he, bitterly.

"For Heaven's sake, I pray you, what are you saying!" exclaimed the old lady, quite indignantly. "Let us thank God that we are alone! It is to be hoped that these walls have no ears! No, no, Balduin, I really cannot see how you can presume to make such a criticism!" she added, with a shake of her head. "That is quite a different case! The first wife was very delicate——"

"Please, mama, do not excite yourself! Let us drop the subject!"

"Well, let us drop the subject!" she repeated after him. "It is easy for you to talk! Of course the tempter will never approach you. After having loved Fanny it is, we know, quite impossible for you ever to take a passing interest in another. Duchess Frederike, on the other hand——"

"Was disagreeable and ugly." Evidently Herr Lamprecht only interpolated these words, in order to keep the conversation from becoming personal.

She again shook her head in disapproval. "I would never allow myself to utter such expressions—the lustre and distinction of high birth conciliate and beautify. Besides there is, as I have said, a great difference; the Duke was bound by no promise; he was free and at perfect liberty to form a new tie."

With these words she again leaned back in her chair, pushed the lace ends of her cap with composure from her face, and folded her hands in her lap, looking down thoughtfully upon them. "You can not, moreover, pass judgment upon such dilemmas, dear Balduin. Fanny was your first and only love, and we gladly gave our daughter to you. And when you engaged yourself to her, your parents wept tears of joy and called you their pride, because your heart's inclinations were lofty, and had never turned into the paths of imprudence." She interrupted

herself with a deep sigh, and stared anxiously before her. "God knows best what a careful, anxious, dutiful mother I have always been, certainly not less so than your parents; and yet I have had to live to see my son take a bad course —Herbert has of late caused me indescribable anxiety!"

"How, the model son, mama?" cried Herr Lamprecht. During his mother-in-law's long speech he paced up and down, his head bent forward, and mechanically stepping upon the bunches of roses placed at regular intervals in the pattern of the carpet. He now paused at the opposite side of the room, and looked with mocking inquiry over his shoulder.

"Hm!" Frau Amtsratin cleared her throat and drew up her figure rather indignantly. "He is in many ways. He has one great ambition——"

"Ah, yes, as I said before down in the courtyard: He will some day climb and climb, until he has left all the others who are striving below him, and nothing above him but the Almighty in His glory!"

"Do you think that objectionable?"

"Certainly not, in case he really has the stuff for it. But how many now are flinging their true convictions from them, play the hypocrite, and flatter and attach themselves to the coat-tails of power in order to become influential men from contact with servile sycophants of mediocre brain!"

"You stigmatize the truest affection and self-sacrifice!" replied the old lady, angrily. "But I ask you, would you have the insolence, the audacity to oppose plans proposed by a higher sphere? I know very well that no one accepts an invitation from the upper ten more readily than you, and cannot remember ever having heard from your lips any opposition to the opinions held there."

Herr Lamprecht did not reply to this sharp and well-grounded remark. He carefully examined the painted

landscape, before which he was standing just then, and asked, after a short pause: "With what have you to reproach Herbert?"

"That of a degrading love-affair!" burst forth the old lady, bitterly. "Were it not too German and too vulgar an expression, I would say that I wish this Blanka Lenz was at the antipodes. The boy stands constantly at the hall-windows and stares over at the warehouse! And yesterday the breeze wafted at my feet a pink paper, which the infatuated youth probably dropped out of an exercise book—of course it contained an ardent sonnet to 'Blanka!' I am beside myself!"

Herr Lamprecht was still standing on the same spot with his back to his mother-in-law; a strange agitation possessed him—just as he had in the court a short while since, he swung his clinched fist through the air, as if flourishing his riding-whip.

"Bah, the milksop!" said he, as she ceased, exhausted, letting his hand fall. He drew up his magnificent form, and with a military, yet elegant movement he turned upon his heel and faced the long pier-glass which showed him a flushed countenance with a contemptuous smile upon it.

"This milksop is the son of an honorable house—do not forget that!" replied his mother-in-law, raising her finger.

Herr Lamprecht laughed harshly. "Pardon me, mama, with the best will in the world I cannot look upon the beardless son of the Herr Amtsrat, notwithstanding the halo surrounding his birth, as dangerous and seductive!"

"You must let the ladies decide that," said the Frau Amtsratin evidently wounded. "I have every reason to believe that Herbert in his evening promenades under the wooden gallery, this Juliet's balcony——"

"How—he dares this?" cried Herr Lamprecht—at this

moment his face was unrecognizable, so terribly did anger distort his handsome features.

"You talk of 'daring' in reference to this painter's daughter? Are you mad, Balduin?" cried the old lady, highly incensed, rising suddenly with youthful elasticity to her feet. But the son-in-law did not stand his ground under the bitter torrent of words which he expected would inevitably follow; he retired to the window-niche—there he drummed upon the panes so violently that they shook.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake, what came over you, Balduin?" cried the Frau Amtsratin, in a somewhat gentler but still angry tone, following him to the recess.

The sight of the objects out of doors seemed to have brought him to himself. He ceased drumming, and looked down sideways upon the little lady. "Is it incomprehensible to you, mama?" he asked scornfully. "Should I not be angry if upon my estate—I mean, in my house—such rendezvous are improvised by the schoolboy which he still is! Disgraceful! A flogging with the birchrod would be quite proper!" Again the angry gleam flared up; but he suppressed it. "Bah, do not let us worry about this, mama!" said he more calmly, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. "The affair is too childishly stupid! We will manage the immature boy, who now should be buried up to both ears in Greek and Latin—do you not think so?"

"Well, you see, we are on equal ground, if you are a little too severe in your expressions!" cried she, with evident relief. "This is just why I asked for an interview with you. But do not think, that I fear for Herbert's future on account of this flirtation—he would never forget himself so far——"

"As to marry the daughter of a china decorator? Good

Lord! His Excellence! Our future Minister of State!" laughed Herr Lamprecht.

"Herbert's career today seems especially to bother you —well and good! What is to come will come notwithstanding all this," said she, pointedly. "But let us leave that out of the question; I have now only his examination on my mind. It is our sacred duty to set all aside that might in any way divert his mind, and this unhappy fancy for the girl over there is the first thing to be considered."

While she was speaking, he walked away from her, and again began to pace to and fro. Now he took down from one of the bookshelves a tiny volume, opened it and seemed to be examining the contents.

The old lady trembled with indignation. Having but just without any cause shown the most violent temper, he now made no secret of being bored, his passive manner was impertinent! But she understood him—at times he could be very capricious and odd. However, this time he must maintain silence until her object be attained.

"I cannot comprehend what the girl is staying so long in Thuringen for," she continued. "At first they said she was going back to England, and was only spending four weeks with her parents in order that she might rest up. Now six weeks have flown, and although I have watched them closely, I do not see that any preparations for departure are being made. Such parents—I almost said deserve a 'flogging!' The girl is literally idle. She sings and reads, dances about and sticks flowers in her red hair, and her mother watches her with rapture while day after day she stands in the corridor and by the sweat of her brow irons the light summer gown that the little princess may always look coquettish and seductive. And around

this will-o'-the-wisp my poor boy's every thought flutters! The girl must go away, Balduin!"

The leaves of the book rustled beneath his fingers, which rapidly turned the pages. "Do you want her put in a convent?"

"I earnestly beg of you no jesting! The affair is very grave. The 'whither' is very indifferent to me; I say only one thing—she must leave our house!"

"Whose house, mama? As far as I know we are in the Lamprecht house, and not on my father-in-law's estate. Besides, the painter, Lenz, lives way across the court-yard——"

"Yes, that is what makes it so incomprehensible!" she interrupted, prudently disregarding his sharp correction. "I cannot remember the warehouse ever having been occupied."

"But it is occupied now, dear mama," said he, with feigned composure, throwing the book carelessly upon the table.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Unfortunately—and in addition it has been newly-papered for the people. You are beginning to spoil your workmen——"

"The man is no common workman."

"My God, he decorates cups and pipe-bowls! You will surely not show him such respect for that, that he may live in the principal's house? There is surely room enough in Dambach!"

"When I engaged Lenz a year ago, he made the condition that he be allowed to live in the town, because his wife has some organic trouble which often makes it necessary to have the doctor's advice on very short notice."

"Is that so!" She was silent a moment, then she spoke curtly and with decision: "Very well, nothing can be said against that, and I will be satisfied, if her voice does

not ring out across the court, and if the little coquette will cease her flitting to and fro on the gallery. There are enough apartments for insignificant people in the town."

"You think I should suddenly turn the man out of his quiet retreat, because—well, because he is so unfortunate as to have a pretty daughter?" His eyes gleamed as he looked at the old lady—a sullen light glowed in them. "Would not all my people think Lenz had done something wrong? How could I do such a thing to him? Give up all thoughts of that, I cannot do it!"

"But, my God, something must be done! This can and must not go on!" cried she, in despair. "Nothing is left me then but myself to go to the people, and to arrange it so that the girl will go away. I will not hesitate to offer them money, and were it to be a considerable sum."

"Would you do this indeed?" Something like secret terror was apparent in his low voice. "Do you want to make yourself ridiculous? And above all, do you want to injure my reputation as employer in the eyes of all by this strange step? Are people to think that the welfare or misery of my employés depend upon your private interest? I cannot suffer that"—he paused; he probably felt that he had been too violent for the sensitive ears of a lady. "It has always been a pleasure and satisfaction to have my father and mother-in-law in the house," he added, with more composure, "and the sense of unbounded power in your home has never been marred; I have at least at all times strictly insisted that none of your rights should be interfered with one iota. In return I too require that there be no interference in my department. Excuse me, dear mama, but in this I cannot have any joking; I might possibly be very disagreeable, and that would be undesirable on both sides!"

"Pray, dear son, you are exciting yourself needlessly!"

interrupted Frau Amtsratin, coldly, but with an aristocratic, evasive wave of her hand. "And at bottom it is nothing but a whim which makes you so obstinate—another time it would be a matter of indifference if decorator Lenz with his family had a roof over his head or not—I know you! Well and good! Of course I have to yield. For the present I shall be forced to be constantly upon the watch, and not to have a comfortable hour——"

"You may rest quite easy on that score, mama! You have an excellent ally in me!" said he, with a sardonic laugh. "There will be an end of evening promenades and ardent sonnets—my word on it! I will follow upon the heels of the infatuated youth like a bailiff, you may depend upon it!"

The hall door without was noisily opened, and footsteps came tripping across the hall.

"May we come in, papa?" cried Margarete's little voice, while her tiny fingers knocked loudly.

Herr Lamprecht himself opened the door and admitted both children. "Well, what is it? You ate all the cakes yesterday, you sweet-tooths, and the sweetmeat-box is empty——"

"Ah, no, papa, that is not it at all! Today there is cake baked in a form downstairs!" said the little girl. "Aunt Sophie wants the key—the key to the room at the back in the dark passage, the room which is always locked——"

"And where the lady looked down into the court from the red drawing-room," completed Reinhold.

"What nonsense is that? And what silly talk is that about the lady in the red drawing-room?" scolded Herr Lamprecht in a harsh voice, without, however, being able to conceal a certain anxious pricking up of his ears.

"Ah, stupid Barbe tells about that, papa! She is so

dreadfully superstitious," replied Margarete. . . . And she told about what she had seen at the window, about the large red-flowered bouquet in the faded curtain which had suddenly opened, of the snow-white fingers and the brow with the fair hair, and of how Aunt Sophie insisted it was the sun, which was not true—and Herr Lamprecht turned to one side and took up the volume he had laid down, in order to return it to the bookshelf,

"Without any doubt it was the sun, you little goose! Aunt Sophie was quite right," said he, and only after the book was carefully replaced did he turn around. "Just think of it yourself, child!" he said to her, touching her brow smilingly with his index finger. "You came up here to fetch the key to the room which is locked up, and I have it—it is hanging there in the key-cupboard. Can a creature of flesh and bone creep through the cracks in a door?"

The girl stood there, looking thoughtfully before her. She was not convinced, that could be seen ; upon her high, defiant, childish forehead was plainly to be read : "What my eyes have seen, I cannot be talked out of!" an expression of countenance which her grandmother especially could "not bear." So papa's arguments bore no other results than that the child said gravely : "You may believe me, papa, it was surely grandmama's housemaid."

Herr Lamprecht laughed heartily, and Frau Amtsratin, in spite of her vexation, could not refrain from, too, laughing softly. "Emma, child? My gracious, what nonsense there is in your head, Grete! Do you know," she turned to her son-in-law with a significant glance, "that the servants are again annoying us with the familiar, rehashed tradition? Reinhold's mention of the lady in the red drawing-room proves to you that the ridiculous persons cannot hold their tongues before the children. Each has

seen something, and this time not simply shadows and clouds of cobwebs—Emma, for example, vowed with chattering teeth that the phantom was transparent, and that from the flying veil for a moment was seen an arm white and round!" . . . She nodded her head expressively, and pressed her clasped hands to her breast. "If only there is not behind all this a direct connection between Herbert and certain people! The thought makes my blood boil!"

"Sapristi—that might be!" said Herr Lamprecht, with a demoniacal smile, as he stroked his beard. "Argus eyes and watchful ears would surely be necessary. . . . I am, moreover, weary of this eternal chatter among our servants —the house will be talked about! It has been a mistake from the first not to use the wing; thereby the crazy vision of an old nurse has gained credence year by year. I will put an end to it! I would like to take in a couple of porcelain turners, with their families, from Dambach, but the people would have to go through the hall, past my doors, and I should not like the noise! I will make short work of it, and for a time occupy Frau Dorothea's room——"

"That would surely be a radical means!" said Frau Amtsratin, with a smile.

"And a lock-fast door, which would shut off the corridor near the hall, would be desirable—then the cowards who have work up here, would have no more reason to peep around the corners and to stare so long that they see creatures of their own brain . . . I will consider the matter!"

He took up a *bonbonnière* from the writing-desk. "Only see, a few sweetmeats have crept into this!" said he, filling the childrens' hands with bonbons. "So—now go down-stairs again! Papa has a great deal of writing to do."

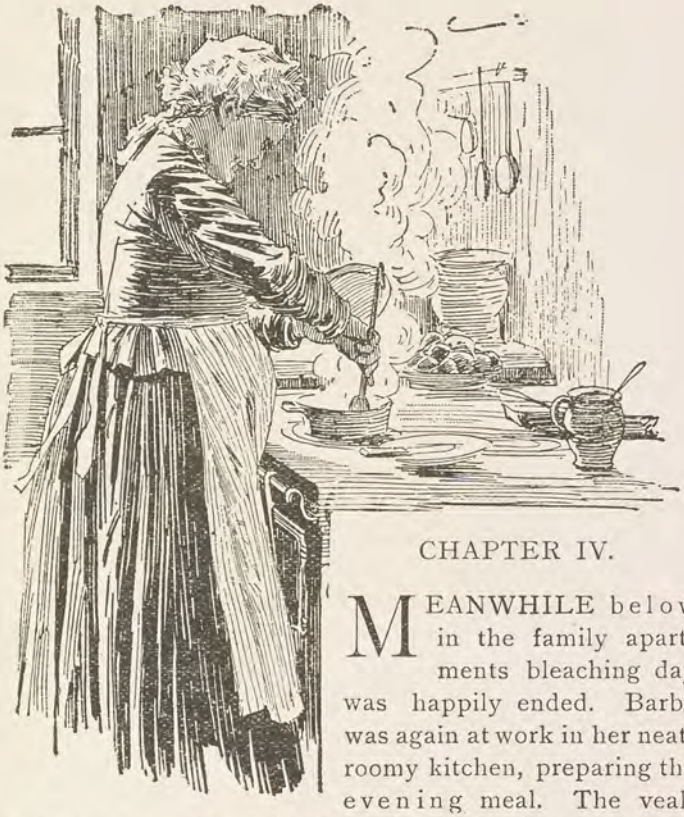
"And the key, papa? Have you quite forgotten it?" asked little Margarete. "Aunt Sophie wants to go up, and to open the windows. She says it will not rain, and that the night air should blow in ; tomorrow the rooms and the hall are to be scrubbed."

Herr Lamprecht colored with anger." To the deuce with this eternal scrubbing!" he broke forth, impatiently running his hand through his luxuriant hair. "Several days ago the hall was flooded, and the noise of the scrubbing-brushes is still ringing in my ears . . . It cannot be done! Go downstairs, Gretchen, and tell your aunt, there is time enough for that, I will talk with her myself!"

The children went away, and Frau Amtsratin drew her pelerine more closely about her shoulders. She took leave of him with a rather distant manner. She was not satisfied, her heart was heavy ; the china decorator was more firmly fixed than ever in the warehouse, and her once so gallant son-in-law was becoming unpleasantly obstinate. And now, notwithstanding his respectful inclination, his eyes betrayed no feeling of remorse and apology—but rather a burning impatient desire to be alone. Visibly vexed she rustled out of the room.

He remained standing motionless in the middle of the apartment. The hall-door without closed, and the tiny feet ascended the stairs ; he listened until the sound of the footsteps died away—then with a bound he reached the writing-desk, pressed the portfolio to his heart, to his lips, repeatedly stroked the small water-color with his hand as if to erase the glance which had rested upon it, and locked the portfolio in the desk. This was the work of a few seconds. Immediately thereafter the room was unoccupied. . . . Soon the evening shadows stole in, the pink light paled, and in the twilight the picture of the late Frau

Fanny which hung upon the wall became so lifelike that it seemed as if the very next moment the life-sized form would gather up its gray satin train and step down upon the carpet, in order—gray and slender, the large eyes full of passionate fire—to flit away, like—the deceased Frau Judith. . . .



CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE below in the family apartments bleaching day was happily ended. Barbe was again at work in her neat, roomy kitchen, preparing the evening meal. The veal-roast was promptly cooked, and salad and *compote* prepared; but things were not very peaceable. The kitchen utensils clattered suspiciously, potatoes rolled over and fell from the table to the floor, and the doors of the oven were swung upon their hinges with the danger of becoming unhinged . . . Miss Barbe was angry. Aunt Sophie had again taken her to task, because with her drastic description of the fluttering curtain she had so greatly intimidated

the washerwomen that they refused to do the scrubbing in the haunted wing. . . . So, besides her fright, she had to be lectured, thought old Barbe, who, in case of necessity, would have died for the Lamprecht family—*nota bene*, for Fraulein Sophie especially! . . . Were they really so blind, so unbelieving and frivolous that they could not see the misfortune hanging over the house as thick and black as a hail-storm? Did it not mean death and destruction every time that the ghosts ran to and fro in the dusky corridor? One needed only to go through the town—yes, one could go from house to house, and in the assemblies of ladies, as well as at the washtubs, could be heard things about the "ghost" in the Lamprecht house, things which caused one's hair to stand on end. But there they sat comfortably at the sitting-room window, and darned the steward's torn face in the marriage at Cana, as if the world's salvation depended upon the old tablecloth, and as if there were nothing but sunshine in the house! Well, all right! It would come once, that was sure! . . . And the kitchen Cassandra, after the delivery of this monologue took up a large earthen vessel upon the stove in order to drown her vexation in a draught of coffee.

They were not, however, sitting at the sitting-room window so comfortably; for it was an arduous task for Aunt Sophie's skilful hand, that of restoring the steward's face to its original lines, without making the darning visible. Nor did Margarete feel especially comfortable at the other window. By means of a clean apron the bilberry stains had been hidden from sight; then Aunt Sophie had taken the girl by the shoulder, and in a very energetic manner had led her to the large table in the window-niche. "Now your school-work can be done!"

"Pull yourself together, Gretel!" she said.

So she had to sit still within the four thick walls, and

hold her penholder tightly that it might not make extra excursions on the white paper! In the evening sky the tiny clouds grew rosy red; the window was open, and from the opposite street came streams of the fragrant elm blossom odor; this odor came through the gateway of the town-wall into which the street up above merged, and even over the old, blackened walls themselves, behind which ran the magnificent elm avenue.

From the market-place came all sorts of sounds. Apprentices went past whistling with their large stone bottles to fetch the evening beer; from all the streets came maids and women with wooden tubs to the market-fountain, and the servants held tin sieves under the conduit-pipe, and allowed the fresh, sparkling water to run over the green salad—it was so pretty, it attracted one's gaze. Beneath the window two little beggar-maids were bantering on passing. Margarete leaned out, put her hand in her pocket and threw into their aprons the sweetmeats received from her papa. "That is right, Grete!" said Aunt Sophie. "You have been eating too much candy of late, and it will give pleasure to these children."

"I shall not give away my bonbons," said Reinhold, who was building a tower with his blocks on the dining-table. "I shall save them. Barbe always says to everything: 'Who knows how we may need them again!'"

"Zounds, our boy is every inch the merchant!" laughed Aunt Sophie, industriously continuing her work.

Yes, aunt was right—of late the two children had eaten too many sweetmeats! The sweet stuff had no relish. How changed papa was too! Formerly they had spent hours upstairs with him; he had let them ride upon his back, had shown them pictures and explained them, had told them tales and made paper-boats, and now? Now he always paced the floor when they came; he often

looked cross and said sharply they disturbed him, he could not have them there. There was no longer any thought of the pretty paper-boats, still less of the narration of stories. Papa preferred talking to himself, no one could understand it, it was but muttering. Sometimes, too, he ran both his hands through his hair and stamped his foot, apparently oblivious of the fact of his children's presence; and when it occurred to him, he hastily stuffed their pockets and hands with sweetmeats and pushed them out of the door, because he had writing to do, a great deal of it . . . Ah, that stupid writing—it was unbearable! And after all these reflections with their hated closing thoughts, the pen was angrily thrust into the ink, and there upon the paper lay the most beautiful blot imaginable.

"Unhappy child!" rebuked Aunt Sophie, hurriedly approaching the table. The blotting-paper was at hand, but on seeking for the erasing-knife the girl was forced to acknowledge that her teacher had taken the knife from her, because during the tedious arithmetic lesson she had carved on the school-desk. Before Aunt Sophie could give vent to her righteous indignation, the little girl was already out of the door in order "to borrow papa's pen-knife."

A few seconds later she stood at his room door with a puzzled look on her face. The door was locked; no key was in the lock and through the keyhole she could see that the chair before the writing-desk was vacant . . . What did this mean? What papa had said about his writing was untrue—he was not writing, he was not at home at all!

The little girl looked around at the large hall. It was so familiar to her, and yet at this moment so strangely new and different. How often had she romped and played here

with Reinhold; but she could not remember ever having been upstairs entirely alone.

It was now to be sure somewhat shadowy, but so solemn and delightfully quiet in the hall! Through its high windows one could look over the court, past the low warehouse, far out into the green, blooming world. Upon the sideboard stood all sorts of sparkling drinking vessels, and the chairs, upholstered in yellow velvet, had carved backs of dark wood, the carving representing strange birds and tulips and foliage with long stems. Blots and penknives were totally forgotten; the merry hoyden with the reckless, honest manner wandered from chair to chair, stroked with her hand the faded velvet, and wove a strange network of thoughts which were not disturbed by a sound from without.

The last chair stood in the corner, rather near the door which led into the red drawing-room, and from this point one could look obliquely into the dark corridor behind Frau Dorothea's room. This corridor, the extreme end of which was illumined at this moment by a last rosy evening light which entered through the tiny window, was familiar to her, it had never had any terrors for her. To be sure Reinhold paused at the entrance, and did not venture farther; but she always traversed it as far as the small staircase which led sideways to the garret-door of the warehouse. Upon the one side handsomely paneled doors broke the monotonous wall surface, and against the rear wall stood clothespresses with two doors and metal ornaments.

Aunt Sophie had once opened these clothespresses in order to air them, and Margarete had caught a glimpse of their contents. There hung costly brocaded gown after the other, of gay colors, some of them with threads of gold and silver interwoven—the state robes of the ladies of the

Lamprecht family. Frau Judith's wedding-dress, her wedding-slippers, veritable frights of shoes, were piously collected here; she was indeed the only daughter and sole heiress of an aristocratic, wealthy family, a considerable portion of the Lamprecht fortune was based upon her dowry. Little Margarete did not know that, nor would she have understood it—she simply sought occasionally to shake the cupboard doors with her tiny hands, in order to hear the mysterious sound of the rustling of the stiff silk hanging therein.

Now she was here all alone. Her brother was not with her to tug at her dress, and his anxious cries did not disturb her. She walked down the hall and was about to pause before one of the presses, when she distinctly heard a sound as of someone in her immediate neighborhood repeatedly trying the lock of a door. The little girl picked up her ears, in delighted surprise drew back, and slipped into the dusky corner next the press, from which point of vantage she could see the opposite door. . . . Ah, she would note Aunt Sophie's eyes when she heard that it was not the sun! And "Gretel" would be in the right, it was Emma, and were she to pretend ever so much that she was afraid—she was still in the room! A serious fright could not harm her at all!

At this instant the door opened noiselessly, and a tiny foot stepped across the raised threshold onto the floor of the passage; then, arrayed in white, a form flitted through the narrow opening made by the door. . . . Nothing was to be seen of the white apron and the coquettishly sweeping flounced-dress of the housemaid; a thick veil enveloped the entire figure from head to foot, and its lace border trailed upon the floor. But it was Emma nevertheless who was joking—she had a tiny foot like that, and always wore pretty slippers with high heels and rosettes of ribbon. Forward, charge! This was a famous joke!

As nimbly as a kitten the child glided from her place of concealment, followed the fleeing form, with all the force of her small body she flung herself from behind upon the figure, clinging to it with both arms; as she did so her tiny right hand passed through an opening in the veil and touched the soft waves of a loosened braid of hair which flowed over the figure's hips—she clutched it firmly, and, as a punishment for the "silly trick," she pulled the ends so vigorously that the muffled head was drawn backwards.

A cry of terror followed by a mournful sound rang through the passage—what occurred then came so swiftly, so unexpectedly, that neither at the time nor later on the girl could remember it clearly. She was laid hold of and shaken so that her sense of sight and hearing forsook her; her tiny form was hurled like a ball quite a distance, almost to the entrance to the corridor and struck the floor.

She lay there stunned, with closed eyes, and when she finally opened them, her father was standing over her, looking down upon her. But she scarcely knew him—she had a horror of him, and involuntarily closed her eyes again, feeling distinctively that something dreadful was

about to happen; for he looked as if he did not know whether to strangle her or to trample upon her.

"Get up! What are you doing here?" he cried, in a voice scarcely recognizable, seizing her rudely and setting her on her feet.

She made no reply; fear and the harsh treatment she had been subjected to sealed her lips.

"Did you not understand me, Grete?" he asked, in a more composed tone. "I want to know what you are doing here!"

"I was looking for you, papa; but the door was locked, and you were not at home——"

"Not at home? Nonsense!" he scolded, pushing her on before him. "The door was not locked, I tell you—you were clumsy about opening it! I was here in the red drawing-room"—he pointed to the door towards which he was pushing the little girl—"when I heard your scream."

Margarete planted her feet firmly upon the ground so that Herr Lamprecht was obliged to pause as well, and turned her face toward him. "I did not scream, papa!" said she, with wide-open, surprised eyes.

"You did not? Who did then? You surely do not wish to make me believe that there has been anyone besides you up here?" His face turned red, as it always did when he was angry and impatient, and his eyes gleamed in a threatening manner.

She had told an untruth! Every drop of blood in the child, who was the embodiment of truthfulness, rebelled. "I am not trying to make you believe anything, papa! I am telling you the truth!" she insisted, looking up at the flashing eyes bravely and honestly. "You can depend upon it, someone was here! It was a girl. She came out of the room, you know, where I saw the forehead with the light hair at the window. Yes, she came out of there, and had slippers on with ribbon rosettes, and as she went on, I heard the heels tap the boards——"

"Are you mad?" He turned with a jerk towards the corridor. The pink cloud had meanwhile sailed on, and only the pale sky looked through the high, tiny window—a gray, dusky light began to fill the long corridor.

"Did you see anything more, Grete?" he asked, stand-

ing behind her and leaning with both hands heavily upon the child's shoulder. "No? Then listen to reason, child! The imaginary maiden could not have fled through the hall, for we would have barred the way; the doors, as we see them, are locked, that I know best, for I have the keys—or do you believe that a person could have flown out in the only way that remained, through that tiny window?" Apparently more composed, he took her by the hand and led her to one of the hall windows. He took out his pocket-handkerchief and wiped from her face the tears which fear and horror had drawn from her; his glance suddenly became pained and compassionate. "Do you now know that you were a real little goose?" he asked, with a smile, as he bent over and looked in her eyes.

Stormily she threw her small arms about his neck. "I love you so dearly, so dearly, papa!" she declared, with all the fervor of an ardent, tender, childish heart, pressing her thin, sunburnt face against his cheek. "But you must not think I told a falsehood. . . . I did not scream just now—it was she! I thought it was Emma, and wanted to frighten her for her stupid joke. But Emma has not such long hair, that has just occurred to me, and my hand still smells of ottar of roses, for I held on to the hair, and the whole girl smelt of the sweetest roses—it was certainly not Emma, papa! . . . Of course, no one can fly through the little window; but perhaps the door to the

short stairs was open, you know, the attic-door of the warehouse——"

He had already before this, starting impatiently, taken her arms from his neck, and now he interrupted her with a loud burst of laughter; but notwithstanding this laughter, he suddenly turned so pale and looked so angry that the child shrank timidly into the window-niche.

"You are an obstinate, thick-headed creature!" he scolded, his brows contracting darkly. "Your grandmother was right in saying that the proper training was lacking. In order to uphold your imagination, you have concocted a most nonsensical fable. . . . Who would care to hide in a lumber-room, filled with rats and mice, simply to tease a little girl like you? . . . But I know what it is, you have been in the servants' hall too much, and your head has there been crammed full of all sorts of stories, and afterwards you dream impossible things in broad daylight. In addition you are as wild as a boy, and Aunt Sophie is much too weak and indulgent. Grandmama long since implored me to put an end to it, and it shall be done immediately! A couple of years under other discipline will render you tractable and well behaved!"

"I am to go away?" exclaimed the child.

"For a couple of years, Grete," said he, more gently. "Be reasonable! I cannot bring you up; grandmama's nerves are too unstrung for her to be able to bear your boisterous manner all the time, and Aunt Sophie—well, the housekeeping depends entirely upon her, and she cannot give you the attention you should have——"

"Don't do it, papa!" she interrupted, with a determination almost unnatural for a child. "It will be of no use—I shall come back again!"

"We shall see——"

"Ah, you have no idea how I can run! Do you

remember when you gave the gentleman in Leipsic our Wolf, and afterwards the good old dog early one morning lay at our door, tired out and very hungry? He was homesick, the poor fellow, so he broke the rope and ran away; I will do the same!" A heartrending smile hovered around the quivering lips.

"I believe it, you are intractable enough! Nothing will be left you but to submit—with such a defiant little person one makes short work!" said he, severely. As he spoke he turned away and made a pretence of looking out of the window into the court; but in reality his furtive glance scanned the tiny face which now mirrored a terrible inward agitation, and as if urged by an irresistible impulse, he again leaned over and softly passed his hand over the child's cheeks, now flushed with the glow of fever.

"Come, be my good girl!" he coaxed. "I will take you away myself—we will travel together. And you shall have pretty dresses, just like our little princesses."

"Ah, I had rather you would give them to some other child, papa!" replied the little girl, in a low voice. "I always tear and stain mine the first day. Barbe always says: 'It is a pity for every yard of goods which little tear-devil gets put upon her!' and she is perfectly right! I do not want to be like the little girls in the castle"—she defiantly raised her head, and ceased picking nervously at her fingers—"I cannot bear them, because grandmama bows before them constantly."

A sarcastic smile flitted over Herr Lamprecht's face; nevertheless he said, in a severe tone: "You see, Grete, that is just what drives your grandmama to despair! You are a rude little thing, and have the most objectionable manners—one is forced to blush for you. It is high time that you should go away!"

The little girl raised her tearful eyes expressively to his.

"Did my mama, too, have to go away when she was a little girl?" she asked, with difficulty suppressing her tears.

A dark flush suffused his face. "Your mama was always a very good, obedient child; it was not necessary." He spoke in a low voice, as if there were in the hall besides himself and the child another person of whom the loud tone was afraid.

"I wish my poor mama was here again! To be sure she preferred having Holdchen on her lap to me, but I was never told I must go away. . . . A mama is better than a grandmama! When she goes away to the baths, she is delighted, and scarcely says adieu. She does not know how a child loves all, everything, papa, our house, too—ah, and Dambach." She paused, as if her childish heart was already breaking at the thought of a separation. Her head pressed close to the windowpane, she sought with an imploring, upward glance the eyes of the stately man drumming lightly on the sill, and visibly struggling with inward emotion.

He was silent at the child's eloquent complaint. His eyes wandered aimlessly over the extensive landscape without, and when they finally were averted from the scene, a sudden tremor passed through the tall form, and the fingers ceased their drumming . . . Papa was startled—at what? Nothing was to be seen far and wide. The sun had long since set ; there was not a sound to be heard in the fields ; not a swallow was visible ; even the pigeons, which during the day fluttered about the roof of the warehouse, had sought the cote, and in the silent gallery under the archway of leaves of the Spanish elder stood only Blanka Lenz, as she was to be seen every night since she had come from England.

But this time the child had no eyes for the lovely white face, which gleamed like moonlight so softly amid the

dark foliage over there—she only saw how her papa sighed, how with a groan he raised both hands to his temples, and pressed them as if his head threatened to burst.

The child drew nearer him, and looked up still more beseechingly at him. "Do you still love me, papa?"

"Yes, Grete." But he did not look at her, he still stared at the same spot.

"Just as dearly as you love Reinhold? Eh, papa?"

"Why, of course, child!"

"Ah, then I am happy! You will let me remain here, too! Who will play with Holdchen? Who would be his horse if I were no longer here? Other children would not do it, because he uses the whip so roughly. Then, papa, you were not in earnest about going away? You simply threatened me, because I am as wild as a boy? But I will be different, I will, too, be polite to the little princesses! Eh, can I remain with you and all? Papa, do you not hear?"

Herr Lamprecht started at the touch of the child as if awakening from a tormenting dream. "Heavenly Father, child, do not annoy me, too, with your abominable questioning! It is enough to drive one mad!" he said to the terrified child. He buried both hands in his hair, repeatedly held his brow, and paced to and fro several times in wild haste.

It may have been only the monotonous "questioning" which by persistent repetition had irritated him—he only grasped the meaning of the same when he grew more composed. "You have a very false impression, Gretchen!" said he finally, in a milder tone, as he paused in his walk. "In the place to which I wish to take you, you will have a number of merry playmates, all little girls, who love one another like sisters. I know many a child who has wept bitterly when taken home . . . Besides, your education at

some institute has been a matter long since determined between your grandmama and me—it is but a question of the time, of the 'when' of admission. I have made the resolution, and it cannot be altered. It will be best for me to go at once to Aunt Sophie, to consult with her as to what is required."

With these words he advanced to the hall door. "Come with me, Grete! You cannot stay up here!" he called to her, as she stood motionless in the window-niche. She crossed the hall slowly with bowed head—he allowed her to pass him on the threshold, then he turned the key, took it out and went down the stairs.

CHAPTER V.

HERR LAMPRECHT did not concern himself any further as to whether his daughter was following him. He was soon downstairs, and she heard him enter the sitting-room while she was still standing on the stairs. Resting her hands upon the balustrades, she slowly descended step by step. The door of the sitting-room was left open, Herr Lamprecht's strong, full voice was plainly audible, and as she came down the stairs Margarete heard him telling Aunt Sophie of the loud screams and footsteps in the corridor of the side-wing, of the imaginary apparitions in broad daylight, and of his presence in the red *salon;* he insisted that the child had imagined the phantom in the dark passage, that the "old woman's stories" in the servants' hall was to blame for this, and that Margarete must be immediately sent away to school in order to shake off all these impressions, and, moreover, to be made more courteous and maidenly.

With noiseless footsteps the little girl passed the door. She cast a timid glance into the room—her brother had left his tower which he was building, and was listening with open mouth, while Aunt Sophie's dear, merry face turned pale; she pressed her clasped hands to her breast, but she uttered not a word, "because it would be of no

use," thought the child as she flitted by, for when papa once formed a resolution in conjunction with grandmama, no prayers would avail, grandmama carried her point. Only one person had any influence, if he chose to interfere, to storm and rage, and that was grandpapa at Dambach. He would succeed, she knew! He would not allow his Gretel to be dragged away, still less to the "large bird-cage where they all had to whistle the same tones," as he always said when grandmama alluded to a girl's school. Yes, he would keep her! What would they do, if he—as was his habit when opposed too greatly—rapped upon the table with his strong knuckles, and said, gravely, in his rough voice: "I ask for peace, Franziska! I desire it so, and I am master here!" Then grandmama invariably left the room, and the affair was ended. Ah, were she only in Dambach there would be no more danger!

She ran out into the court in order to take the goats out of the stable, but the groom had locked the doors, and then, too, the rattling of the carriage would make to much noise; then someone came and shut the gate in her face, and she had to stay there. Nothing was left her but to pull herself bravely together, and to walk. It passing out she had picked up her hat, which still lay upon the garden-table; she tied the ribbons under her chin and set out.

No one saw the child as she slipped through the gate-way of the warehouse into the street. Not a soul was in the court; even Blanka Lenz had left the open gallery. Without, too, all was deserted; the people were not yet sitting at their doors, the evening was not far enough advanced; only a couple of tiny barefooted urchins were sailing some paper-boats in the canal, which divided the street in the middle. "They are fortunate!" thought the girl, crossing the bridge to the neighboring street; then one came to a breach in the wall, and from thence a foot-

path ran through the fields and up a slight knoll to Dambach. To be sure it took a rather wide curve, and was lonely; but she was familiar with it, and now took it—upon the more frequented main road, at every breath of wind, rose suffocating clouds of dust, which had that afternoon as she drove in powdered her as if with flour.

Ah, that afternoon, all was yet well then! She could have cried aloud with delight when the goats rushed out of the Dambach courtyard gate with her; grandpapa had laughed and called after her, "Hurrah!" And the viliage children, her faithful playmates, had run along a part of the way, and the boys had said to each other: "Zounds, but she is a great one!"

Now she was returning to hide at grandpapa's. Ah, if he would but keep her there altogether! She would gladly go to the village school. And grandmama never came there—she always said she could not stand the noise of the factory, to which grandpapa always laughingly replied that he stayed there because he could not hear her parrot screech.

While this confusion of thoughts whirled through the child's excited brain, her tiny feet proceeded hurriedly on their way forward. For quite a distance there was nothing but waving cornfields, and then the little girl felt somewhat depressed—since she had been here last with Aunt Sophie, the green stalks, now bleached to a pale yellow wall upon each side of the path, had grown so high! Only a little stretch more, and the child was as if enclosed in the cornfield; and the chafer, which spread out its blue, glittering wings, and, humming softly, soared aloft; the breezes, which, aided by the stalks, rose in order to obtain a better view, had better times than she. Above the child's head there was a rustling sound, a silken rustle, as of a trailing garment coming softly toward her, which made her look

up fearfully, but "it is a far cry to Loch Awe, and there is no witchcraft in the world!" Aunt Sophie always said, and so there could be no one softly treading upon the waving surface of stalks—it was only the nightwind passing over, and causing the nodding ears to brush against each other.

Now, too, the narrow street finally terminated; the road led over potatoe and turnipfields, then over downtrodden grass, up the knoll, which was crowned by a tiny forest, the so-called Dambach forest; behind this lay the village. It was still light enough for the child to be able to see the large strawberry plants, with their white blossoms and ruddy fruit, between the tree trunks on the edge of the forest; but this time there was neither time nor inclination to pick and eat; at a breathless pace she had ascended the hill—her tiny heart throbbed within her breast; her head was hot and as strangely heavy as if there were lead in her brow and temples. Well, grandpapa's room was cool; there stood the large sofa, with the soft cushions, upon which he always took his afternoon nap, and the child always rested there, too, when she was tired from walking. Only the tiny stretch behind the village—then all would be well!

The immense factory courtyard lay there silent and deserted, the workmen had ceased their work, and there was not a sound in the adjoining garden, with its clear, pretty pond, in which the pavilion was mirrored, but the soft rustling of the treetops, beneath which it was already growing dark. Not even Friedel, grandpapa's pointer, barked and ran to meet the child—the threshold, upon which he generally lay, was deserted, the door, too, was closed—it seemed to be tightly locked, and not a soul stirred within or appeared as she rang repeatedly.

In helpless affright the little one stood before the silent

house—grandpapa was not there! This had never once occurred to her—it had seemed to her a matter-of-course that he must be at home when she came. She went around the house on all sides ; had one of the windows on the ground floor been open, she would, as she had frequently done, have climbed up and jumped from the sill to the floor ; but at all the windows the blinds were closed —nothing was to be done.

She was on the verge of tears, but she bravely suppressed them. Probably grandpapa had only gone to the foreman's, and he lived over there in the factory. But in the courtyard a young stable-boy told her the foreman's family had gone to town, in the "master's carriage" on its return, to a wedding ; the master had gone away several hours before, he had seen him ; there was a skittle party today at the head bailiff's at Hermsleben—which was quite a distance from there.

Almighty Father—what could the poor child do! In her first despair she again approached the courtyard gate, while the servant went back to the stable. But after taking a few steps she paused—it would be impossible to walk to Hermsleben, it was much, much too far! No, that could surely not be ; it would be better to wait grandpapa's return—perhaps he would come back soon!

Feeling somewhat reassured, the little girl ran back to the pavilion and seated herself patiently on the threshold of the house-door. This rested the tiny, weary limbs, and the deep silence roundabout was refreshing after the exciting walk. If but the stupid throbbing in brow and temple would cease; now, as she shrank into the angle of the door, it was doubly noticeable. And, too, all sorts of anxious forebodings filled her aching head. Supper-time at home was long since past, and she had not been present at the table. In all probability they were searching for her

everywhere, and at the thought that Aunt Sophie might be worried about her, her little heart ached deeply. If only it did not occur to anyone to look for her in Dambach before her grandpapa returned. In horror she started up, and her eyes sought some place of concealment into which in case of necessity, she could creep; for as she had run away, no doubt remained but that on the morrow she should be taken back immediately—grandmama, that inexorable grandmama, who could be so unjust! If Holdchen clumsily fell down, she "wild girl," was chidden; did he weep from wilfulness, "that naughty child, Grete," must have provoked him—such a grandmama could never know how dearly one could love a little brother, and would gladly taken even the bread from one's mouth—ah, so gladly—could he only laugh and be merry! . . . Ah, those on the uppr floor were all against Grete! And almost worse than grandmama was Mosje Herbert, whom she was to call "uncle"—a fine uncle, who had no beard, and who had to work just as hard as she had at his school tasks! She needed the rod, he had said that afternoon, and her fingers, which he had almost crushed in his anger, still ached. . . . How pleased he would be, if tomorrow they should indeed put Grete in the carriage and mercilessly drag her to the "bird-cage!" But it should not be—God forbid! She would rebel with all her might, she would scream so that the people would gather on the market-place! . . . Ah, if grandpapa would only come!

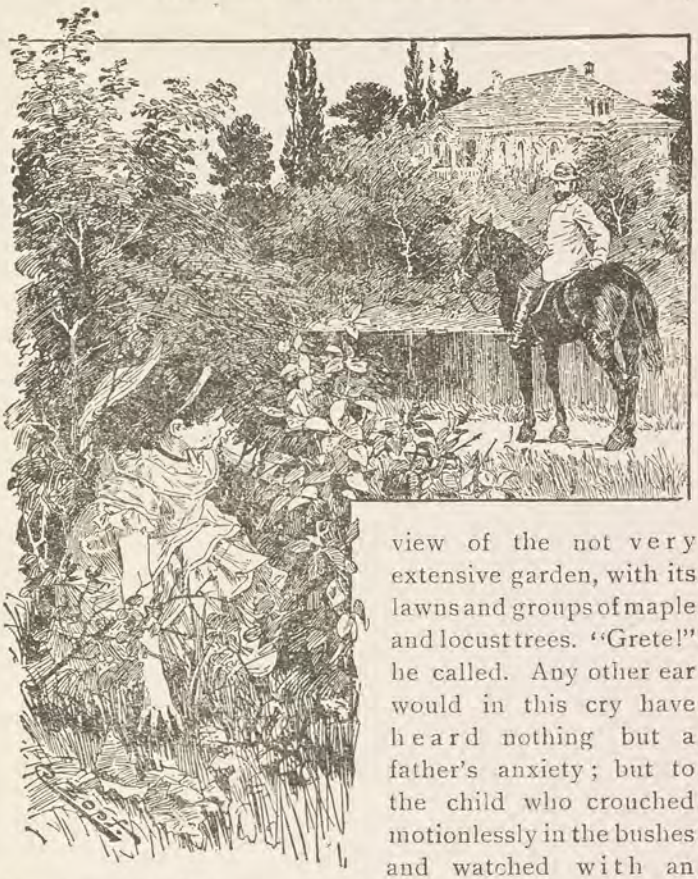
But the garden was deserted; even the rumbling and creaking of the wagon-weeels upon the highroad had ceased. The silence of night began to fall, although it hesitated. It had been a glorious day, and as the hot breath of the sun still brooded heavily over the earth, a remnant of the bright glory of day seemed yet to linger in the air and not to wish to evanesce.

The clock in the factory tower chimed one quarter of an hour after the other. It was past nine o'clock and no doubt the worst was now over. In town grandpapa invariably retired at ten o'clock—he was a stickler for regularity, and would surely return to Dambach soon. . . . Ah, yes, and when she should hear him galloping up from Hermsleben she would run to meet him and trudge along beside the horse; then at least he would look down at his "romp," and then no one could harm her—no one!

Suddenly indeed a horseman rode up—but the child did not run to the gate; for a moment she listened with horror to the tramp of the horse's hoofs, then with a bound she sprang from the angle of the door, ran around the pond and crept into the almost impenetrable thicket, which lay between the opposite side of the pond and the iron gate, separating the garden from the courtyard of the factory. The horseman was coming from the direction of the town—it was her papa in search of her.

She crouched among the thorny bushes; the white dress with its bilberry-stains was torn, and her feet sank into the swamp; notwithstanding, she cowered upon the damp ground, and lay there as if she wished to reduce her frail form to naught. With abated breath and her chattering teeth firmly compressed, she listened as her father from the courtyard talked with a maid at one of the windows. The maid told him that the child had turned before her eyes, and had gone back to the town; she had seen her run out of the gate.

In spite of this assurance Herr Lamprecht rode in the garden. From behind the bushes Margarete could hear Lucifer's wild snorting—papa must have taken a rapid pace—then she saw the horseman. He rode around the pavilion and could obtain from his horse's back a good



view of the not very extensive garden, with its lawns and groups of maple and locust trees. "Grete!" he called. Any other ear would in this cry have heard nothing but a father's anxiety; but to the child who crouched motionlessly in the bushes and watched with an almost agonized glance the rider's every movement, the man upon the horse was at this moment the same who on that afternoon had bent over her in the dark corridor, not knowing whether to strangle her or to trample upon her. And now as he, quite near her, paused on the bank of the pond and allowed his eyes to rove over the water, which lay there so white and crystal-clear that even in the twilight the white sand at the bottom could be seen to shimmer,

now when those eyes beneath the heavy, black brows glowed as they always did when he was "terribly angry," the little girl was possessed by an indescribable, a paralyzing sense of fear—breathless, as if petrified, she cowered in the copse; she would rather have been cast into the water than to have allowed a sound to escape her in reply to his call.

Herr Lamprecht turned his horse and rode out again.

It was probably the foreman's servant who crossed the court and opened the gate for the horseman. Herr Lamprecht talked to him, and his voice sounded as faint and hoarse as if his throat was parched with thirst. He inquired about his father-in-law's absence, and the man told him that the old gentleman rarely returned home from the skittle party until two o'clock. What was said besides she could not understand. Herr Lamprecht rode across the courtyard and through the gate, the man seeming to accompany him; the return way to the town was not made by the highway but through the fields.

The little runaway was again alone. Now that the mental torpidity left her, she became aware of the painful pressure laid upon her cramped form by the branches. The dampness had penetrated her thin cloth boots, and the copse was alive with insects, which bloodthirstily hummed around her face and bare arms. With an effort she stood up and pulled her feet out of the morass, which clung heavily to her soles. She uttered a low, hopeless moan—the wicked copse did not want to release her. She should remain in the horrible mouldering scent which by her entrance she had stirred up; caught like a poor little sparrow in the hard, tough network of branches, she must wait until her grandpapa came! Ah, and he would not come until two o'clock! Five long hours she should have to protect herself against the swarm of insects which came

nearer her as often as she tried to catch them! And there was an abundance here of frogs and toads—Reinhold had even said he saw a long, bright snake creep out of the undergrowth. She shuddered with horror, and felt the ground alive around and under her feet; collecting all her strength, she worked her way madly through the strange wilderness until the last strong shoot had closed behind her.

It was a pitiful little figure which staggered rather than walked back to the pavilion. Her hat on forcing her way in had been torn off by the upper boughs—let it hang there! Nor was her tattered frock heeded; but the feet, with their crust of mud, which at every step left black imprints upon the broad, white sandstone steps in front of the door, were startling to look upon.

One star after the other appeared in the firmament—the child in the angle of the door did not heed them. When she raised her heavy lids, she only saw that the darkness below had swallowed up the last faint glimmer of the mirrorlike pond, the lawns lay darkly beneath the trees, all sorts of night vagrants passing by were to be heard, owls screeched, and from the eaves of the pavilion came forth the maurauding bats. As if in a dream she heard the dogs bark in the village, and the clock in the tower had again chimed two quarters of an hour; many quarters would have to chime before it was two o'clock—ah, how terrible! The dampness of her feet caused one chill after another to creep over her, and her brow, which she leaned against the hard door-post, was feverish and ached violently. . . . Ah, if only for a few minutess he could lay her heavy head upon a soft pillow, and drink a draught of water from the cool well at home—that would benefit her! Aunt Sophie always poured a little raspberry juice in the glass when one complained of headache, and for such

stings as now smarted her arms and cheeks she had a soothing salve—ah, yes; it was nice to be with Aunt Sophie! An unconquerable sense of yearning for the faithful nurse suddenly arose within the child's breast.

She again closed her eyes and fancied herself at home in her bedchamber. The windows looked upon the silent courtyard, and the fountain splashed gently and incessantly—it had been the lullaby of both children. She lay in her white, downy bed, and Aunt Sophie cooled her burning face and smarting arms until she fell asleep. Yes, to sleep, to go home and to sleep—that was what she wanted! That was what started her up and caused her to reel through the garden, across the courtyard, and out into the field! She did not hear the clock strike as she passed through the gate—her anxious counting of the quarters of an hour were over; nor did she think of the stretch of road which lay before her, she saw only the goal, the white, cool bedroom in which she could stretch her feverish body with its throbbing pulses; she heard Aunt Sophie's kind voice, and saw the hands which would lift her upon her lap, and strip the heavy, wet weight from her feet—of what would follow on the next day she did not think.

With motion her stiff limbs became more flexible. At a great speed she passed through the silent village. Then the wood was to be seen—a dark mass which had not the appearance of being formed of millions of rustling leaves and leaflets. She passed this point in haste, and only once did the child start—some white garment was visible through the thicket! Ah, it was the birches with their light trunks, only they did not stand firmly, they were so strangely shaky, and the little star which immediately afterward rose over the valley—the light in the high tower-room of the watch-tower, which overlooked the city—this

wavered as well, as if the old, square tower were beginning to dance. But this astonishing apparition soon was forgotten in the one thought urging her forward: Farther! Home to Aunt Sophie!

In the nodding cornfield she could hear Reinhold cry because "wild Grete" had overturned his tower, and Barbe continued to mutter about the lady with the rubies in her hair, and about the moving curtain in the closed room, and the scarlet poppies, which today the child saw glowing like brands amid the corn, made the narrow, dark street stifling hot; but she could not lie down upon the cool ground—far away up there Aunt Sophie was calling: "Forwards, Gretel! See to it that you come home!"

So she obediently went on, to be sure finally with trembling knees and gasping for breath, until the town was reached. In several of the houses of the last street through which she wearily stole a light still burned, but the doors were closed, and the child's weary footsteps made a noise upon the hollow canal-bridge, so still were the lanes and streets. At length the arch of the gateway of the warehouse was above the head of the girl; it was too bad that the heavy old-fashioned lock on the gate was so high up that a child's hand could not reach it. After a vain attempt the child sank upon the low curbstone. She thought the entire world was revolving with her, and she could hear nothing owing to the hammering and throbbing of her pulses; but the murmur of the rushing water of the canal reached her ear, and the coolness which it gave out had a reviving effect upon her waning consciousness. And now, too, some one was coming up the street; the footsteps which neared the warehouse were firm, and in a few minutes a man stepped under the archway. The starry sky diffused sufficient light for one to be able to recognize the outlines of a form—the man was Herr Lenz, who lived

at the warehouse, and of whom little Margarete was exceedingly fond. When she was playing in the court he frequently jested with her, and in reply to her friendly greeting he would stroke her hair caressingly.

"Let me go in, too!" she murmured, hoarsely, when he had opened the gate with the key and was about to enter.

He turned. "Who is there?"

"Grete."

"What, the child from the house? For God's sake, little one, how come you to be here?"

She did not reply, but groped for his right hand, which he extended in order to help her up; but that would not do, so without any further ado he lifted her in his arms and carried her inside the deep archway.

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN all was dark. Herr Lenz with his burden groped his way forwards, and at length noisily pushed open a door to his left. Immediately a ray of light from above fell upon the steep stairs.

"Ernst?" asked a woman's voice, anxiously.

"Yes, it is I safe and sound, Hannchen! Good evening, too, dearest love!"

"Well, God be praised that you are here! Why, my dear man, where *have* you been?"

"I went farther than I thought I should!" said he, ascending the stairs slowly. "This beautiful Thuringian Forest entices like a will-o'-the-wisp—one point is grander than the other! So one goes on and on and does not think of the homeward way. My legs are very tired; but the sketchbook is full, little mother."

As he spoke, he appeared above the balustrades, and his wife, who was standing at the head of the stairs, started back.

"Do you see what I am bringing with me, Hannchen? I picked this up in the doorway," said he, pausing on the top step, with an expression half-smiling, half-anxious. He tried to turn his head in order to examine the child on his arm by the light; but her arms were twined convulsively about his neck, and the tiny face, almost hidden by the tangled hair, was pressed against his cheek.

Frau Lenz hurriedly set the lamp upon the hall-table.

"Give me the child, Ernst!" said she, considerately, extending her arms to receive the girl. "You must not go a step farther with your poor, weary limbs—but

Gretchen must go at once! They have been seeking her for hours. Lord, but there is a commotion over at the house. All is in confusion, and old Barbe is howling in the kitchen so that we can hear her across the court. Come here, my pet!" she coaxed, in a soft, tender voice. "I will carry you over!"

"No, no!" cried the child, anxiously, clinging still more closely to her bearer's neck. If all was in confusion over there, then grandmama, too, would be downstairs, and although her aching head was confused, she was perfectly clear as to her reception on the part of the old lady. "No, don't carry me over!" she repeated. "Let Aunt Sophie come here!"

"Very well, dearest! Then we will fetch Aunt Sophie," soothed Herr Lenz.

"Just as the little one wishes," assented his wife, who listened with anxiety to the hoarse, gasping voice of the child, and with a quick movement and keen glance put back the tangled hair from the disfigured little face. Silently she took the lamp and opened the chamber door.

The warehouse, the oldest of the buildings, dating from the time of the founding of the family, was a massive edifice, with thick walls and deep window-niches, whose facade proper lay towards the north, facing the street; therefore, was so delightfully cool and pure—a breeze laden with the perfume of mignonette wafted towards those who entered. Here in the quiet, cozy home of the decorator's family did the child readily give herself up to the care of the gentle, kind woman, who took her upon her lap, while Herr Lenz removed her hat, shawl and traveling bag.

"Blanka is outside on the gallery," said Frau Lenz, in reply to the searching glance which her husband cast around the room. "She was just arranging her hair for

the night when the coachman from the house inquired for Gretchen of us. To be sure, we had long before noticed the excitement over there Herr Lamprecht rode back and forth at unusual times, and every bush in the courtyard was examined. However, we obeyed your order, as always, to see nothing that occurs in the house and courtyard of your employer. But since the coachman has been here, our child has been sitting out there upon the dark balcony, and cannot be induced to come in—the dear, little thing there is her idol, although she knows her only by sight—but, for God's sake, child, what is the matter with your feet?" she interrupted herself. The lamplight fell upon the muddy boots which lay upon her light dress. Quickly she felt the edges of the torn dress which, too, had absorbed the dampness of the marshy ground.

"The child has been in the water," said she, half aloud and angrily to her husband; "she must have dry clothes as quickly as possible. Go call Blanka!"

He opened the door at the end of the room. The room at the back—the kitchen—was dark, but through the opposite door, which was wide open, and which led to the gallery, could be seen the glimmer of the lights from the Lamprecht domain.

At the father's call light footsteps hastened over the balcony-floor, then beautiful Blanka stepped from the dense darkness onto the threshold of the door in a white lace-trimmed dressing-jacket, with pallid cheeks and bare arms hanging at her side, her loosened hair falling around her like a golden shower. "You have come at last, father?" she asked, in a vibrating tone. With a timid air and downcast eyes she paused—it looked as if she could not bear the lamplight, which fell upon her so suddenly and so brightly, and as if she had but one wish—to fly back into the darkness.

"What—is that my little girl's only greeting?" cried Herr Lenz, humorously. "Neither a kiss nor a hand-shake? And, too, I brought with me a lost sheep! Do you not see who is sitting there on your mother's lap?"

With an exclamation of surprise, the young girl started up and flew towards the child.

"Ah, see!" said Frau Lenz, half-amused, but, too, a trifle hurt. "Father might really be jealous? You indeed worried more about the strange child than about his remaining away! Now help me to tidy up your pet, and to put dry clothes on her. In the lower drawer of the commode there must be dresses and stockings which you wore when a child; seek them out!"

She seated the child upon the sofa and brought water and a towel, while the young girl kneeled upon the floor and hurriedly examined the contents of the drawer.

"Where have you been, childie?" asked Frau Lenz, as she untied strings and opened buttons; the little one's body was bathed in perspiration.

"I have been to Dambach," replied Margarete. "But grandpapa could not help me; he was not there." And, while Frau Lenz washed the muddy feet with a soft sponge, it seemed as if all she had suffered, as if all that had occurred in the last few hours, must be told of to ease the child's angry heart. With hysterical haste all was described, the horrors amid the thicket and the fear that her papa might alight from his horse and search the bushes—and why had she fled to her grandpapa? Well, because a white form was always flitting through the dark corridor and frightening the servants. And the room was not locked—certainly not! She had distinctly heard the lock turn, then she saw something as white as snow glide through the aperture, and there was long hair under the

veil ; and because the girl had screamed so loudly, papa now wanted to send Grete to school.

"Undoubtedly, delirium! The child is seriously ill," muttered Herr Lenz, with averted face. "Hurry with your undressing!" and he withdrew quietly in order to notify the Lamprechts' of Grete's return.

The dress and stockings must have been put in some out-of-the-way corner, for beautiful Blanka still kneeled before the commode and hunted. In her white raiment, and with her long, fair hair sweeping the floor, she looked like a princess stooping to a maid's service. A second drawer was noisily opened. Frau Lenz arose rather impatiently, and approached her. "Dear heart, you are taking too long, and I am not in the habit of having such a confusion that nothing can be found. Where are your eyes, little mouse! There is the blue flannel skirt right on top, here in a corner are three pairs of stockings, and there, too, is a nightgown!"

She took out the articles, and closed the drawer.

The young girl no longer had an excuse to remain in the semi-darkened corner, and when she hesitatingly turned towards the light, every vestige of blood seemed to have vanished even from her lips.

"Child, why do you worry so!" cried her mother, in affright. "It is not so bad as your father thinks. Children are subject to high fever, but it speedily passes off. In a few days your pet will have recovered—you will see! Here, put the tired little limbs in clean stockings, while I go out and prepare a cooling drink."

In silence the daughter unrolled the stockings, kneeled in front of the sofa and prepared to clothe the tiny bare feet ; but scarcely had the kitchen-door closed behind Frau Lenz than with a passionate gesture the young girl raised herself, twined both arms about the child and pressed her

"WHY, BLANKA, THE CHILD IS STILL BAREFOOTED," REPROVED FRAU LENZ. (P. 79.)

to her breast. Margarete opened her feverishly bright eyes in astonishment.

"Ah, do you love me, Fraulein Lenz? Yes?"

Pretty Blanka nodded in the affirmative—in her suppressed pain she bit her underlip, and a tear stole from under her lowered lashes.

"It is nice here in your cool room!" murmured the little one, resting her cheek affectionately against the wealth of golden hair which fell upon the maiden's breast. "I should like to stay here! . . . Grandmama never comes—she never goes to the wharehouse—nor papa either. But Aunt Sophie will come. . . . Put me to bed!"

At this moment the mother re-entered the room.

"Ah, and how sweet you smell, Fraulein Lenz!" said the child in a louder voice, drawing a deep breath as she raised her head. "Like the loveliest roses, just like——"

A pair of warm, quivering lips were pressed firmly upon her mouth, stifling her words.

"Why, Blanka, the child is still barefooted," reproved Frau Lenz. "And who would excite a patient by one's own agitation! Go away, you tactless little thing! I will attend to dressing her myself."

In a few minutes the child was undressed; haste was necessary indeed, for, as before in the cornfield, feverish fancies were mingled with the child's own thoughts. Frau Lenz held the glass she had brought in with her to her lips, and eagerly the longed-for draught was swallowed. Immediately afterwards footsteps ascended the stairs, and Herr Lenz admitted Aunt Sophie.

One familiar with the merry face of the happy "old maid" would have been startled, so terribly had anxiety changed it in both lines and color in the last few hours. With a silent bow to the housewife and the pretty lassie,

who had again fled to her shadowy corner, she approached little Margarete, who languidly extended her arms. One single, searching glance, one examination of the childish brow, and she knew that a severe illness was about to begin.

"That comes from treating such a tender creature like a poor instrument upon which one can pound as one likes," said she severely, with infinite bitterness!

She enveloped the child in a shawl which she had brought with her, took her in her arms and offered her hand to Herr and Frau Lenz. "Thanks, many thanks!" More she was incapable of uttering as she left the room.

Below in the courtyard a tall form stepped forth from the obscurity, and advanced to meet her. Little Margarete was terrified, and a tremor ran through her frame when two hands seized her—it was papa, who drew her towards him with an impatient gesture.

"My dear child, my sweet Gretchen, do not fear, it is I, papa," said his deep voice. He held her close to his panting breast as he bore her across the courtyard and into the brightly-lighted hall, where everyone rushed towards him and the child, but he raised his hand, demanding silence, and, passing them by, he proceeded to the childrens' bedroom.

"Well, then it's all right! The gypsies did not steal her, and she was not killed, God be praised!" said Barbe, afterwards in the kitchen to the others, as she took her "first bite after so many hours of agony." "But no one need tell me that the affair is ended. Whosoever saw the poor thing with her dangling arms and legs, as she was carried past by master, he will be able to tell. . . . What did I say this afternoon? Some misfortune is about to befall, said I. But you always say: 'Superstitious Barbe, always portending misfortune, the old gossip!' Ah, yes,

anyone can scoff, that is no art, but to give proof, that is a horse of another color. We shall see some day who was right—the clever people who believed in nothing, or old Barbe with her nonsense! Would such a one as the lady with the rubies rove about the corridor up there for naught! It is not the first time that such a poor innocent little child has been 'fetched.' Mind this—things are going cross with our poor Gretchen."

At these words she again put down her fork, with its morsel of food, and hid her face in her blue gingham apron.

And for weeks the prophetess of the kitchen had the sorrowful satisfaction of day by day being able to call attention with increased emphasis to "what she had said." With genuine grief she already thought to herself to be sure, and with sorrow, of the most beautiful wreath of flowers to be had, and of the verse in gilt letters on a broad white satin ribbon, with the name "Barbara Wenzel" upon it, when the child's strong constitution conquered, and the disease took a sudden and favorable turn.

Sunshine again appeared in the house. Herr Lamprecht, who in the hours of danger had scarcely stirred from his daughter's bedside, drew up his bent form, and in his looks and his actions his fiery nature again became apparent—yes, people said he had never in his life looked as "triumphant" and as commanding as now. But what the others in the household remarked with delight, displeased old Barbe. He had carried out his determination of himself, for a time occupying the late Frau Dorothea's haunted apartments; the corridor, too, was shut off from the hall by a door. To the old cook it was worse than blasphemy when she saw him carelessly draw back the faded curtains and step to the window in a challenging, sinful manner. No one any longer spoke of the white lady—of course!

No Christian could see through a thick board-door! But the morning did not seem to come on which the master was found in his room with a broken neck—on the contrary, as we have said, he seemed to have taken a new lease of life.

And grandpapa, who on that "unlucky night" on coming from Hermsleben had not even dismounted, but rode on to the town, grandpapa again jested in his rough, jovial way; but on the day, when for the first time his favorite was allowed to be out of bed all the afternoon, the ground burnt his feet, and he rode away. That wretched screech-owl, that spoilt beast in the upper story, was driving him from his own four walls, said he, still laughing, from his horse's back, while his wife stood upstairs at the window stroking her parrot, and offering him a lump of sugar.

Two days latter Herr Lamprecht went away likewise—for a long time, his employés in the counting-house said. Little Margarete looked into his face in astonishment, as on bidding her farewell he leaned over her and promised to send her the most beautiful things.

"I have never seen papa like this, so 'exceedingly happy,' and with such a strange glitter in his eyes," said she.

"I believe you," said Aunt Sophie, "He is glad that his little runaway is well again, and when his business trip

is ended he is going to Italy, and still farther. He wants to see the world again, and he is right! He cannot be grudged a little pleasure after such an anxious time as he has had—we have all had enough. Ah, Gretel, I shall remember the bleaching day as long as I have my eyes in my head!"

And the elms in front of the factory in the meanwhile grew darker; from the rosebushes, like drops of blood fallen from heaven, glowed the buds of the Jaqueminot, and upon the sparkling water of the fountain already floated the first autumn leaves, when the little convalescent was allowed to go out of doors. All was very different, but the strangest thing of all was that papa had lived up there, where now, after his departure, the rooms were being thoroughly aired. The windows were wide open, the beautiful frescoing on the ceiling of the large sitting-room, with its three windows, were to be seen, and in the adjoining chamber the green silk-canopy of a four-post bed. Upon the windowsills stood and lay, on account of the dusting, all sorts of modern objects, smoking paraphernalia, statuettes, albums and piles of newspapers—Herr Lamprecht had made the outlawed apartments very habitable.

The child looked up thoughtfully—from the room with its magnificent frescoing the veiled lady had glided, it was the second door in the corridor from behind which the small foot in its dainty slipper had appeared. Since her recovery, she remembered all this distinctly; but she did not speak of it, because no one heeded her questions and her stories—she did not know that the doctors had declared her "vision" in the corridor to have been the beginning of her nervous illness. And so the whole matter with its unhappy results was not mentioned, nor was another word said about sending "unmannerly Grete" to an institute.

Upon the open gallery of the warehouse all was still, the summer breeze alone occasionally stirred the green network of the Spanish elder, separated it, and caused the foliage to rustle as it fell back. In the pretty room with its scent of mignonette surely sat the lady with the dear, loving, motherly face, and mourned, for beautiful Blanka had, too, gone away; she had left that morning and "had gone into a position in far, distant England," so Barbe had told Aunt Sophie that morning; and at this little Margarete had started from her morning doze, and in order that her aunt and Barbe might not hear her, had wept among her pillows. But at this moment when Reinhold had gone into the house in order to fetch his building-blocks, and the little girl sat alone under the elms, the old cook crossed the courtyard, her hand under her apron, and examining with an inquisitor's glance the windows in the upper story of the house.

"Fraulein Sophie knows about it, and wants me to give it to you, Gretchen; but Frau Amtsratin need not to see it," said she. "When you were ill, the pretty maiden on the balcony there would sometimes watch for me for hours, for I had to tell her how you were exactly. She never came into the courtyard once while she was there—good Lord, indeed, your papa and your grandmama are proud people and will brook no officiousness and forwardness; but today very early, when I was fetching the water for the coffee at the well, she crossed the court, with her traveling-coat and hat on, as pale as death, and her eyes swollen from weeping, for she was going away into the wide world, and she said I should give you her love and this."

She drew her hand from under her apron and laid a tiny white package upon the garden-table. With a cry of delight, the child took a little bag embroidered with marguerites out of the paper.

"Be quiet—be quiet, Gretchen—you must not exclaim so loud!" warned Barbe. "It was a strange affair this morning, and not at all nice of Frau Amtsratin—'whatsoever is right,' I always say. It was no such dreadful thing that young Master Herbert should at that moment come down to the spring with his glass, as he has done every morning for the last few weeks! He looked ill, like a corpse, and advanced to the girl—I think he wanted to say something, perhaps 'a pleasant journey,' or some such polite thing; but there was Frau Amtsratin, too, with her

nightcap still on, and her nightrobe fluttering about her as if she had just jumped out of bed; and she looked at the girl as though she would have liked to annihilate her. But the latter merely bowed low and joined her parents, who were awaiting her at the gate—you know, Gretchen, our duchess is not any prouder or more reserved than this decorator's daughter, leaving beauty out of the question altogether; and it may be that her haughtiness provoked your grandmama, for before I realized what she was about, she had torn the paper I held in my hand and looked in.

"'It is for Gretchen, Frau Amtsratin!' said I.

"'Is that so?' said she, in a loud, angry voice. 'How does Fraulein Lenz happen to give my granddaughter a keepsake?' And this the poor girl, as well as her father and mother, must have heard. The young master was as much ashamed as I was—he looked terribly angry, and rushed into the house. . . . That is the whole affair, Gretchen! Frau Amtsratin wanted to take the package away from me altogether, but I took to my heels, and Fraulein Sophie says she cannot see why you should not wear the bag."

She returned to her kitchen, and little Margarete considered and grieved. Her heart ached, and tears of anger rose to her eyes because the kind people at the warehouse had been insulted. And Barbe was right, Herbert looked quite different, so pale and so dreadfully serious; he talked to no one, not even to Reinhold, who was his favorite. Ah, grandmama! She could at times look so severe, and the senior wrangler, Herbert, was afraid of her, too—that the child had noticed. But it availed nothing, and though grandmama scolded ever so much, and looked ever so severe, she wore the bag nevertheless—she would wear it every day, even when papa should return from his journey and scold her; for he was proud, was papa, even worse

perhaps than grandmama; one could hear that by his sharp tone when he gave orders, and, moreover, he never talked with the workmen, who were beneath him. The decorator's family, too, were too humble for him; he always looked as if he did not know that anyone was living in the warehouse, and whosoever wished to might be upon the open gallery, he never glanced up there. On that miserable night he did not even enter the house; he preferred to wait in the dark courtyard without until she was brought out. During her illness only had he not looked proud; when she was better, and he was sitting alone at her bedside, she had even ventured to tell him of the pretty room in the warehouse, and of the pretty maiden; of how she had come in from the balcony, so pale and with flowing hair; how she had pressed her head so close to her breast that her soft, thick hair fell heavily over her face. And papa did not even scold—he was quite still; he kissed her brow and pressed her as tightly to his throbbing breast as beautiful Blanka had done. And at this she still wondered today.

CHAPTER VII.

THE town of B—— was the capital of the country; but its beautiful, healthy situation made it the preferred summer-resort of the reigning duke, notwithstanding the fact that the castle, although imposing on the exterior, was not roomy enough for a larger court household. During the past three years it had not been so necessary to "crowd" the summer guests in the castle—for both the beautiful princesses, scarcely out of their childhood years, had been wooed and won, and had, even for princesses, made brilliant marriages, while the hereditary prince was away on a tour.

It was a matter of indifference whether May was balmy and warm, or whether crossing the snowy mountain-summits it came with a chilly breath through the valleys of the forest—promptly on the fifteenth of May every year the cavalcade of carriages from the Residence drove to lovely B——, and soon afterwards the chimneys of the castle began to smoke hospitably, and occasionally a carriage drew up at some of the most aristocratic houses —the ladies of the court were paying calls. The Lamprechts' house was one of those favored in this way— Frau Amtsratin Marschall was as well-liked at court at this day as she had been ten years before; for fully ten years had sped by since that ill-fated bleaching day on which little Margarete had fled to Dambach, fearing lest she might be sent to a boarding-school.

The favor of the ducal sun of course beamed upon all connected with the old lady; so, for instance, the firm of Lamprecht & Son was represented by a counsellor of

commerce, the only one of the town of B——, for his serene highness was very chary of giving this title. Nor was Herr Balduin Lamprecht unaffected by this rare favor; his business friends maintained that he carried his head so high they could scarcely stand it. Formerly he had at least been courteous, but even this disappeared in a repellent, moody haughtiness.

For years no one had seen him smile. He traveled a great deal on business, and was more active than he had been during the early years of his self-dependence; but when he came home the house was overshadowed, the voices of subordinates were hushed to a whisper, all faces wore a look of anxious fear, footsteps sounded muffled, as if each one dreaded startling an evil spirit which might be lurking in some corner. "The fatal hypochondria—a Lamprecht inheritance!" said the physician, with a shrug of his shoulders, in reference to the moodiness of the head of the family, who often secluded himself for days at a time. "The best remedies would be to drink plenty of water, and to saw wood!" Frau Amtsratin nodded her head in assent; it was nothing but the old inherited evil—absolutely nothing else!

But Aunt Sophie smiled angrily when this wise speech reached her ears. "Yes, indeed, absolutely nothing!" she would say, ironically. "He does not even long a little for a truly domestic life—God forbid! The man should thank the Lord that a certain number of years ago he had a wife, and now until his death he can feed upon the memory. . . . Fanny must have fancied the late Judith's last act of malice, for she imitated her. Well, for my part I would not say anything had she left the poor widower at least a couple of sturdy sons; but Reinhold, that constant source of anxiety—Heavenly Father, one could see when he was a babe that there was a screw loose somewhere!"

Indeed Reinhold Lamprecht had been a care to the family. He suffered from some weakness of the heart which forbade all mental and physical strain. He scarcely felt the deprivation of all the grand pleasures of youth himself, for his heart was centered in business. But when the counsellor saw the tall, pale, thin accountant standing at the desk with the cold calculation of an old man, unconcerned as to whether the trees were showering their blossoms broadcast, or whether the snowflakes were dancing without, an expression of anger and impatience was visible upon his countenance, and a bitter, contemptuous glance scanned the frail creature who some day would represent the house of Lamprecht.

But he never mentioned it ; he merely clinched his fist convulsively in silence when Frau Amtsratin expressed her delight in the fact that her deceased Fanny's aristocratic composure had been inherited in so striking a manner by her son. And to be sure the first-born son of the Lamprechts' was not sickly according to her idea—God forbid! He had but a delicate, sensitive constitution—a woman like Fanny could surely not have been the mother of robust peasant children. Margarete, too, was pale and slender, but healthy. One had only to read her letters—the girl could endure fatigue and exertion like a man! . . . To be sure these acts of valor were not to the old lady's taste ; she was not pleased with her granddaughter's course of development. The youth of the only daughter of a wealthy house should, according to her, be spent thus: A stay for a number of years in a school, patronized by the nobility and somewhat orthodox, then introduction at court, and after several years of favor and triumphs, in conclusion a good marriage. But Margarete's obstinacy overcame the institute plan, and to the disgust of her grandmama the girl had been allowed to remain until past

her fourteenth year in her "horrible primitiveness." Then a sudden change took place.

Frau Amtsratin's youngest sister was the wife of a university professor, whose name was very famous. He was an historian and archaeologist, and as he had a considerable fortune, he traveled a great deal in order to obtain material for his scientific works from the original sources, and his wife was his faithful companion—they were childless. After a lengthy stay in Italy and Greece they again returned home, and Frau Amtsratin felt pleased to be able to entertain them a few days as they passed through, for she was exceedingly proud of her brother-in-law's fame.

On the first day the "unmannerly child," Grete, was nowhere to be found by her angry grandmama—who would care to run right into a judicial examination? The celebrated, learned great-uncle in Berlin had always made the girl shudder. He was one of those who would pin unfortunate school-children between his knees, and examine them until they perspired with fear. She had never seen him, but of course he was tall and as stiff as a stick, never laughed, and looked through his large, round spectacles with severe, piercing eyes. But the next morning she had hid behind the buffet in the hall, opposite an open drawing-room door—the professor and his wife were breakfasting with papa. And she opened her eyes in astonishment, for the handsome old gentleman could laugh very heartily. He had a magnificent, white beard, which flowed over his breast, and fine, bright eyes, minus the spectacles. He raised his glass with its sparkling contents like a boy, and gave a waggish toast. Then he told of the Schliemann excavations on Mount Hissarlik, and it was surprising to find that his wife, her great-aunt, with the smoothly-brushed gray hair and the intelligent face, joined in the

conversation, talking with as much intelligence as did the great scholar. Ah, a wide, wonderful world full of old, lost and now again restored secrets was opened before her, and the ignorant young eavesdropper behind the buffet gradually rose from her cowering posture; then a soft footstep glided through the hall, and the tall girl with a timid glance, ready for flight at any moment, but with hands clasped upon her breast listening breathlessly, appeared in the door of the *salon*. . . . "My Grete, a shy bird, as you see!" said papa, waving his hand in her direction, and thereby breaking the spell. Panic-stricken, the "shy bird" fled from the threshold, followed by merry laughter, closing the hall-door noisily behind her, and plunging rather than running down the stairs.

But flight and defiant opposition were no longer of any avail, the little romp had flown irretrievably into another domain; the desire for learning and the thirst for knowledge were awakened within her young soul, and led her again and again to the feet of the narrator; and when in a week's time the carriage stood at the Lamprechts' door, the carriage which was to take the departing guests to the

station, "unmannerly Grete," too, in hat and traveling-cloak, stepped out of the house, with tear-stained face and a sad farewell upon her lips—but she did have to be forcibly dragged into the vehicle, and she did not scream so loudly that the people collected in the market-place, resolutely and voluntarily she went away to study with her uncle and aunt, and to accompany them upon their travels.

Since then five years had flown, Margarete was nineteen, and had not yet returned to her father's house. She had seen her relatives, her papa especially, frequently during this period, partly in Berlin, partly upon her travels at meeting-places appointed, and for the past two years her grandmama's visits to Berlin had become more frequent; she wanted to take her granddaughter home; but uncle and aunt trembled at the thought of separation, and the young girl herself did not feel the slightest desire to return to her home, so to her bitter vexation Frau Amtsratin was always obliged to return alone.

Besides Herbert, Aunt Sophie was the only one in the family who had been obliged to deny herself a meeting with "Gretel." No, no one should say of her that for pleasure, to gratify her heart's longing, she had ever neglected her household, not even for a couple of days! It would not do, her conscience could not be responsible for it, and so the stupid old heart with its yearning had absolutely nothing to say in the matter. . . . But now the purchase of new carpets and hangings for the "best rooms" was becoming a necessity, and Aunt Sophie's fur-cloak, notwithstanding mehlot and pepper, had for years been shedding its fur; it should be cast off. But a new fur-cloak was a dear thing, one could not order it and buy it like a pig in a poke, still less costly carpets and draperies; so it was necessary to go to the proper place;

therefore, Aunt Sophie—in much greater haste, than was needed, but only for "household reasons," went to Berlin one day, and suddenly, with tears of joy in her eyes, appeared before Margarete. And what all Frau Amtsratin's imploring, affectionate and severe words could not accomplish was brought about by the sight of the unforgotten, motherly nurse; an ardent longing rose within the young girl—she wanted to go home for a time, home, to remain until after Christmas; Aunt Sophie should light the Christmas tree in the cozy sitting-room, as she had done when she was a child. And so it was arranged that she should shortly follow her aunt, but no one was to know of it, papa and grandpapa were to be surprised.

So it came about that on a mild evening at the close of September, the young lady, coming on foot from the station, closed the gate of the warehouse behind her, and for an instant paused with a smile under the dark gateway—she seemed to be listening for the creaking and groaning of the old wooden gate, although it had immediately ceased. These sounds had been familiar to her in her childhood, as far back as she could remember, at her play in the court, and had often startled her in her first sleep. And how frequently had Aunt Sophie told her that through this very gate for centuries, loads of linen, the lucrative commodity of the Lamprechts, had gone out into the world! At that time it had not especially interested the romp; but now her eyes were involuntarily raised as if, in spite of the darkness, she must see traces of the piled-up tilt-carts.

In what a different light did the silent court of the old house appear to her since she had studied and traveled. She stood there as though spellbound, after taking several steps forward with mildly pulsating heart. Beneath her feet the withered leaves rustled; the dear, enormous elms

had already for the most part shed their leaves, and behind their trunks were the dark walls of the old weaving-house. This night, as on every night, the bright light of the large lamp streamed from the kitchen-windows; it illumined the court, cast its light sideways upon a piece of the adjoining haunted wing, and caused the large stone fountain-basin in the centre of the court to stand out white amid the darkness of the night. To the surprise of her who had returned home every illumined portion of the facade of the side-building between the warehouse and the large, plain house proper showed evidence of the finest Renaissance style, and the stone figure in the bright light rose above the four mouths of the fountain, this figure at which Herbert at one time and Reinhold later on had thrown stones was a delicately proportioned nymph—at this moment the thought of each of those acts of vandalism vexed the young art connoisseur. On account of their wealth the Lamprechts had been called the "Thuringian Fuggers"—but in the builder of the side-wing with the fountain belonging to it there must have been some of the artistic taste of the celebrated Augsburg weaver, only that he, with a proud contempt for all fame and praise, kept his creation from publicity, and set it up for his own satisfaction in obscurity. That was right! The daughter of the ancient house had inherited her share of burgher's pride—at this moment of her return home *he* contributed his share to the happy pulsation of her heart. Oh, yes, she was a trifle "proud!"

From the figure at the fountain her eyes wandered to the kitchen-windows and she smiled to herself—surely Grecian lines were not to be thought of here; Barbe come from the end of the kitchen, and stepped into the bright lamplight. She was as bearishly big and coarse as ever; the thin, gray knot of hair twisted around the comb at the back of her head was still in the same position, and her

tongue ran as glibly as ever—the sound of her prudish voice came through the open window.

There was great bustle in the kitchen. A number of hands must be busied washing dishes, for there was an incessant clatter; Barbe and the man-servant were drying the plates, and a handsome young fellow in a fine livery went hurriedly in and out.

Undoubtedly there was a dinner-party in the house. Margarete had seen through the hall-window on stepping from the dark gate-arch that the chandeliers in the large *salon* on the *bel-étage* were lighted. This did not surprise her; Aunt Sophie had told her in Berlin that "something was always going on" now at home; there was much "grandeur" between the people at court and the "Amtsrats," and that papa was greatly sought after—and her brown eyes had twinkled merrily. Well, here was a fine opportunity to see this grandeur in the lump, without being seen, just as one can see from the depths of a box at the theatre! It was worth trying!

She passed through the hall into the sitting-room. There it was very dusky; the gaslight came faintly in through the windows and cast but a speck of light upon the wall, and upon the dial of the beautiful, large, familiar clock. The ticking of this old heirloom touched Margarete's heart like the welcome of a beloved human voice.

Aunt Sophie was not there, she no doubt had her "hands full" upstairs; instead of that the entire immense room was filled with the fragrance of her favorite flowers—upon the dining-table stood an immense bouquet of wall-flowers and mignonette, probably the last for that year culled from Aunt Sophie's own little garden by the gate—how homelike it all was!

Margarete threw hat and coat upon a chair, swung herself upon the high windowsill, and looked out upon the

gaslit market-place. . . . All as it once was when she was still a child and had felt the sharp stone edges of the uneven pavement under her feet, when the network of streets, partly surrounded by old walls of defence, was called the town of B——, and had signified to her the world in which at any price she wanted to live and die! . . . All as it once was—the moss-grown neptune upon the market-place fountain; the corner-house opposite, with its statue over the arched doorway—which meant that the proprietor of the house was entitled to brew beer; the shrill little bell upon the city hall tower, which had just struck half-past seven; the distant ringing of various bells on the shop-doors, and even the curious countrywomen craned their necks at the street corner where they stood in a group, sleeping children in their full, round cotton cloaks; they could not look enough at the chandeliers which were lighted upstairs in the Lamprechts' best room, and chattered eagerly one with the other—a genuine gossip at the street corner.

The young lady left her lofty perch at the window, and laughed—she was no better than the gossips. She now flitted upstairs to see what all this illumination meant.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was not difficult for her to walk softly. A new thick carpet upon the stairs deadened every footfall. In front of Margarete hurried a servant, in livery, with a salver, on which were bottles of seltzer water; he did not see the young lady, and he left the door open wide enough for her to creep through.

The hall was dimly lighted; only from the open doors of the *salon* streamed the candlelight, dividing the large room into two parts, and at the moment when the servant with his bottles entered the open drawing-room door, Margarete slipped into the dark background, and sought one of the window-niches.

She could see a large part of the apartment; and it really was as if she were sitting in a box at the theatre and watching an interesting comedy. . . . She could look directly into the face of the first actress—that was the young stranger at the table; she had a pretty, full, calm, smiling face, set upon a snow-white, round throat, and broad, beautiful shoulders. The young lady was seated so that to her without the old Lamprecht *épergne* of solid silver, a large merchantman laden with fruit and fresh flowers, seemed to be close beside her—making a magnificent picture; the flowers were not any fresher than the girl's fair face with its brilliant complexion. . . . So that was she, Heloise von Taubeneck, who at the present time was playing so important a part at "Amtsrats!" . . . Well, it was not to be wondered at that grandmama should "be quite upset," as Aunt Sophie had expressed herself in Berlin, by this new relation. To be able to

some day call her daughter-in-law a niece of the duke—were it but the daughter of the late Prince Ludwig, the offspring of a *mésalliance*—far, far exceeded grandmama's most ambitious wishes! How did she bear this great good fortune?

Well, the old lady, too, was leaning back in her chair

with a blissfully proud expression, her hands folded almost devoutly, her eyes fixed upon the fair beauty by the side of her son, her only one, her adored son, who with rapid strides had risen step by step in the government service, and at twenty-nine years of age was a "counsellor of administration." When a child how often had Margarete heard him called by her papa mockingly, "our future minister." Now he had indeed reached the goal, as Aunt Sophie had told her in Berlin. She had said there was already a rumor that a change was projected—the head of the ministry was ill and wanted to go south. Malicious tongues, however, avered that his excellency had not an ache; the diagnosis did not emanate from the physician, but from an influential person, and that Counsellor Marschall, notwithstanding his actual capability, would not attain that lofty position if—Fraulein Heloise von Taubeneck did not exist. "Ah, the world has a mean tongue!" With these words and a pitying shrug of the shoulders this latest news from home was concluded; but mischief laughed in Aunt Sophie's eyes. Indeed Herbert had really become a fine man, she hastened to add, as if born to a high official's position, where one had to exclude one's self from "cut and longtail."

Why, yes, he was a handsome man, a veritable diplomatist, with his aristocratic assurance. Had she met him away from home, she would perhaps have stopped, but would surely not have recognized him at the first glance. . . . She had not seen him for a long time probably seven years had passed. As a student he had spent most of his vacation in travel, and when he came home once she had wisely avoided the "conceited student," who still had no beard, and, therefore, no right to the dictatorially required title of uncle, and he had never asked where she was—of course!

Now his beard had grown—a fine dark beard, parted on the chin—and the scoffed-at student had become a "counsellor of administration," who was on the verge of matrimony, and who in a short time would have an aunt at his side; then one might conscientiously say "uncle"—yes, without hesitation! The young girl in the dark window-niche smiled roguishly, and allowed her eyes to rove on.

On entering the hall she had been met by a confusion of voices; the conversation was very animated, and she fancied, too, she had heard grandpapa's beloved rough voice. When the servant entered, however, it quieted down, and now only one single quite pleasant, though somewhat fat woman's voice was speaking; it seemed to domineer, and in its modulation lay, especially when it was necessary to answer a question, a quite noticeable condescension. Margarete could not see the speaker; she was probably seated at papa's right, while Fraulein von Taubeneck was his neighbor at the left.

The invisible lady was telling of an occurrence at court, and occasionally interrupted herself with an "is it not so, my child?" which lovely Heloise confirmed promptly and imperturbably. So it was the Baroness von Taubeneck, Prince Ludwig's widow, who was sitting beside papa. . . . How proud he looked! The morbid melancholy which had at every meeting repelled his daughter, seemed today to have been cleared away from the handsome, though swiftly aging countenance. Grandmama was not the only one who was running herself in the beams of the star of good-fortune rising over the family.

Frau von Taubeneck was just describing, with increasing animation, how the duke's horse made every effort to throw his rider, when she suddenly ceased and pricked up her ears. Above her rather loud voice soared into the room a sound, a long-sustained tone, it swelled and

swelled and yet remained spiritually soft and unearthly, until it suddenly broke off to begin a third lower. "Magnificent! What a voice!" exclaimed Frau von Taubeneck, half-aloud.

"Bah—it is a boy, gracious madame, an obtrusive fellow, who flings his tones at people wherever they may be!" said Reinhold, who was sitting beside the Frau Amtsratin at the corner of the table—his weak, boyish voice trembled with suppressed anger.

"Yes, you are right—that singing at the warehouse is becoming an annoyance to me!" agreed grandmama, looking anxiously at him. "Still it has never occurred to me to be vexed about it! Be calm, Reinhold! The family at the warehouse are to us a necessary evil, to which one grows accustomed with time—you will learn it, too."

"No, grandmama, certainly not!" replied the young man, as with nervous haste he folded his napkin and flung it upon the table.

"Bah, how violent!" laughed Fraulein von Taubeneck—what fine teeth she had! "So much fuss about nothing! I cannot understand how mama could allow herself to be interrupted by a few tones, still less can I understand your anger, Herr Lamprecht—I do not hear such a thing at all!" She raised her white arm, bare to the shoulder, took a large orange from the *épergne*, and began to peel it.

Reinhold's pale face flushed somewhat—he was ashamed of his violence. "I am only vexed," he apologized, "because we have to listen in silence to this sing-song. The vain fellow sees at any rate that we have company, and thinks he belongs to it, too—disgraceful! He wants to be admired at any price."

"If you think that, you are very much mistaken, Reinhold!" said Aunt Sophie, passing behind him. She had up to this time been performing her duty at the coffee-

machine, brewing a fragrant beverage, the first cup of which she herself offered Frau von Taubeneck on a silver plate. She wore her heavy black silk gown; her thick gray hair as usual was arranged in two shining puffs on both sides of her polished brow, and over this fell a lovely black lace cap. She looked very aristocratic with her medium-sized, well-preserved figure and her self-possessed manner. Taking the sugar-bowl from the table, she added: "The boy is very considerate of us; he sings to himself like a bird upon the branch. It gushes from his breast, and I delight in it—it is magnificent, a truly divine voice. Do you hear it?" She looked around the circle expressively, and nodded her head in the direction of the court.

"The heavens praise the glory of the Lord!" sang the boy in the warehouse—a sweeter voice had never yet praised the glory of the Most High.

Reinhold cast a glance at his aunt, which aroused the indignation of the listener in the window-niche. "How can you make so bold as to join in the conversation of this select circle?" This question lay plainly enough in the haughty, almost colorless eyes, besides an expression of the deepest bitterness.

Margarete was familiar with the small, thin face upon which the play of the muscles made such hard, sharp lines in moments of agitation; as a child she had anxiously learned to study it, out of sisterly love, and, too, because all were in the habit of making her responsible for every outburst of violence on the part of the frail boy. He had not changed; he had always been accustomed to do what he wanted to on account of his delicate health; now, too, his boundless wilfulness drove the dark blood to his face; with nervous uneasiness his hand seized various dishes upon the table and pushed them against one another, until a sharp clatter involuntarily startled the listener.

"Pardon, I was very awkward!" he stammered. "But the voice makes me quite nervous—it rings in my ear, just as if a wine-glass were being rubbed with wet fingers."

"Well, that can be remedied, Reinhold," said Herbert, soothingly. He rose and came out into the hall, to close the open windows opposite the *salon* doors.

In this, too, there had been no change. Reinhold had always been Herbert's protégé and favorite, and, as formerly, the senior wrangler and student had been eager to clear his delicate nephew's way of all that was unpleasant; the counsellor at this moment was ready to do the same.

Proceeding along the hall, he inspected the other windows and approached Margarete's hiding-place. She drew farther back into the dark corner, and as she did so her silk gown rustled against the wall.

"Is anyone here?" he asked.

She laughed to herself. "Yes," said she, half-aloud; "but no thief or murderer, nor is it Dorothea from the haunted room—you need not fear, Uncle Herbert—it is only Grete from Berlin!"

With these words she stepped out of the corner—a slender maiden, who, smiling, leaned forward a little with indolent grace, in order to prove her statement by the rays of light cast out by the candles in the *salon*.

He involuntarily drew back and looked at her, as if he did not trust his own eyes. "Margarete?" he repeated uncertainly, extending his hand with some hesitation; she laid her cool one in his, and he dropped it without any pressure—quite a formal greeting, but quite in order. "So you have come home in the night-time?" he asked again. "And no one in the house knows of your coming?"

Her dark eyes sparkled mischievously. "Yes, do you know, I did not want to send a courier on ahead—that is a little too expensive for my purse; and so I thought, they

will give you shelter at home, even if you come unexpectedly."

"Well, if for one moment I was in doubt as to whether this young lady here was really merry Grete, I now am sure of it—you have come back as you went away!"

"I hope so, uncle!" He half-turned his head away and a slight smile flitted across his face. "What is to be done now?" he asked. "Will you not come in?"

"Oh, dear no! With the cold autumn dampness in my clothes, dust and dirt upon my face; in addition to that a torn flounce on my skirt and a pair of ripped gloves in my pocket—a fine *début* before the state frocks and court trains!" She pointed towards the *salon* where a loud, animated conversation was being carried on. "Under no consideration, uncle! You would not want to expose yourself to ridicule?"

"As you like," said he, coldly, shrugging his shoulders. "Do you want me to send your papa or Aunt Sophie out to you?"

"Indeed, no!" She involuntarily took a step forward and extended her hand to detain him; as she did so her

head for a moment was flooded with light—a fine, attractive head, surrounded by a mass of dark curls. "No, indeed—what are you thinking of? I am to fond of them both to wish to meet them in the dark! I must have their faces before me distinctly, I must see if they, too, are pleased. . . . And should those in the other room find out that you found me eavesdropping? I am ashamed of it sufficiently. But the light up here enticed me, and the silly candle-fly felt it! . . . Now I shall go again—I have seen enough!"

"Is that so? What have you seen?"

"Oh, a great deal of beauty, genuine beauty, worthy of admiration, uncle! But also a great deal of distinction, a great deal of condescension—too much for our house!"

"Your relatives do not think so!" said he, sharply.

"It seems so," she conceded, shrugging her shoulders. "But they are much more clever than I. I have in my blood some of my ancestors, the old linen merchants' annoyance—I do not accept anything willingly."

He drew back. "I shall have to leave you to your fate then," said he, dryly, with a stiff, straight bend of his head.

"Oh, pray—one moment yet! Were I the lady with the rubies, I could disappear safely and need not to inconvenience you; as it is, however, I must beg of you to close the *salon* doors a moment that I can pass."

He hastily walked towards the doors, which he closed behind him. Margarete flew through the hall; she heard unanimous protestations within against the closing of the doors, and before she had shut the back door behind her, she could see, the folding-doors slowly open again, a man's bearded face looking out covertly, probably to see if the intruder had found the way out—droll! A conspiracy between the proud counsellor and arrogant Grete! Ten

minutes ago he would not have dreamed of such a thing!

A scream welcomed her, as she re-entered the dusky sitting-room. The door leading to the kitchen was flung open and Barbe rushed wildly out.

"Be sensible, Barbe!" cried Margarete, laughing, following her to the threshold of the brightly-lighted kitchen. "I do not resemble her of the red drawing-room at all, and I am certainly not as transparent as cobwebby Frau Judith! . . . Come here and give me your hand, faithful old soul—I have indeed longed for you many a time! There"—she held out her pretty, slender hand—"it is warm, and of flesh and bone! You can safely touch it!"

"The faithful old soul" became wild with delight. She not only seized the hand, but she shook it so that the young girl could neither hear nor see, and the tears gushed from her eyes. . . . Ah, five years had flown, one could not tell how! And Grete had become a lady, cut and dried, like a doll! A paragon!

"Many a time like a little wildcat she sprang from behind upon my broad back, when I did not suspect it, and was busy with my washing," said she to the cook, wiping her eyes and laughing. "Yes, I was always very much frightened!" Her loud voice sank to a whisper. "You should not, miss—I mean, you should not compare yourself to the one up in the corridor! There is a 'but' to it, and you are so pale, so very pale!"

With difficulty Margarete restrained her laughter. "Still up to your old tricks! Well"—the corner of her mouth twitched with gentle irony—"no blame is attached to us, we are quite conservative, Aunt Sophie always said, when Reinhold carefully collected the torn-off arms and legs of my dolls, and respected them as old possessions. . . . You are right, Barbe, I am pale, but still fresh enough to defend myself to the death against your ghosts.

And you shall see, in our invigorating Thuringian air my cheeks will soon be as round and red as Borsdorf apples. But listen!" Through the open kitchen-window came the sounds of the boyish voice. "Now tell me, who is singing over there in the warehouse?"

"It is little Max, a grandson of the old Lenzs. His parents are dead, and his grandparents have taken him. He goes to school here, and must be a son's child—his name is Lenz as well. I know nothing else about it. You know they are such quiet folks; whatever they may have, be it pleasure or sorrow, no one else learns of it.

And our counsellor and Frau Amtsratin cannot bear to have any of us act as if people lived in the warehouse. It is on account of the gossip, you know, Fraulein, and it is right, a house like ours cannot make itself so common. . . . The boy of course asks many questions about our customs—he is a handsome boy, Fraulein Gretchen, a fine boy! But from the first day he descended into the court, and he plays there as if by right, just as you and young Master Reinhold played when you were children."

"Bravo, my boy! A brave little fellow! There is strength and self-consciousness in that!" nodded Margarete. "But what does grandmama say to it?"

"Ah, Frau Amtsratin is of course angry, and the young master, ah, ah!"—she waved her hand in the air—"he is furious! But it is all of no avail, and although spoken ever so plainly in metaphors, the master has no ears. I believe, at first he did not see that the strange child was playing about where it did not belong—he is always in such deep thought—that comes from the blood, Fraulein! Well, yes, and such people at times do not look either to the right nor the left, and other people have no existence for them. When finally it was called to his attention, he said they should let the child play where it wanted to, the courtyard was large enough—and so it remained, the vexation has to be stifled."

She took a pin out of her necktie and pinned a loose bow on the young lady's dress; then she straightened the lace at her neck and with both hands smoothed out her somewhat crumpled silken gown. "So, now you can go!" said she, stepping back. "They will stare up there! To enter the large company so unexpectedly——"

Margarete shook her head so that her curls danced.

This was to be sure not according to the old cook's opinion. It was "extra nice" upstairs today, she said,

and with the champagne all would probably be arranged between the lady from court and the counsellor. . . . "A pair of handsome folks, Fraulein, and a great honor for the family!" she concluded. "To be sure I have seen none of the grandeur, for I am below in my kitchen, but people tell of it, and the envious in the town say, too, that Frau Amtsratin will explode from pride. . . . Ah, the evil tongues! A person cannot be careful enough!"

As she spoke, she took a lamp from the ledge, in order to light it for Margarete; but the young lady objected. She wanted to wait in the darkness until all was over upstairs, and again mounted the windowsill in the sitting-room.

There she sat and meditated; and to all the thoughts which flew through her youthful head, the old clock ticked its accompaniment, and at the same time planed the rising waves in her soul. Reinhold's odiousness and his and her grandmama's haughtiness made her blood boil; but it was suppressed. . . . No, her return to her home should not be embittered! Away with uncomfortable perception! . . . There was the face of the pretty lady from the court, that had nothing agitating about it! She must either have very good common-sense or a phlegmatic nature, this ducal voice with the indescribable composure and tranquility in face and manner. Formerly no one had scarcely known of the existence of beautiful Heloise von Taubeneck. Prince Ludwig had occupied a high Prussian military position, and had his home at Coblentz. He came very rarely to court, and Prince's Court, placed at his disposal by the ducal family, had been unoccupied for years. It lay without the town at the foot of what was once a citadel hill, crowned still by a few ruins of walls, and was a roccoco building of one-story with a mansard roof and the necessary coach-houses and stables, hidden altogether under the

roof of leaves of the grand old nut-trees, while before the ornamental front of the house stretched a rose-garden, with groups of other flowers and statuary. From the Dambach villa could be seen Prince's Court, almost near enough to lay hands upon.

Now it was occupied again, and Aunt Sophie had talked a great deal about the change when in Berlin. Prince Ludwig's widow was glad to be able to "take shelter" there, as the inhabitant of the small town expressed herself in a drastic way; for the deceased had left no money, and the widow's pension was not any too large. But it was known that the ducal pair had formed a warm attachment for the young orphaned niece, and principally for this reason was it no doubt that both ladies received means and privileges which were usually accorded only to those of equal birth.

Well, the equipage, which now came rattling over the market-place and drew up at the door, was elegant enough to have been a princely gift. The open carriage sparkled and glistened in the gaslight, and the fiery team snorted and stamped with impatience.

It was some time before the party upstairs decided to break up, before the voices of the company were heard upon the stairs, and the great housedoor was thrown open to allow the bright light of the hall-lamp to illumine the sidewalk.

In this light first stepped Baroness Taubeneck, leaning upon Herbert's arm, and waddling to her carriage. She was exceedingly corpulent, and the daughter, who followed her, would probably be like her later. Of course, at the present time her tall, full figure showed beautiful, symmetrical lines. She drew the black lace scarf more closely about her fair hair, which fell upon her forehead, seated herself with dignity beside her panting mama, and looked

down very coldly upon the remaining guests, who, while bidding farewell again, surrounded the carriage, to disperse in all directions.

Herbert immediately retired with a low bow—that did not look as if the engagement had really taken place. On the other hand, Frau Amtsratin had taken the young lady's hand between hers, pressed it as she talked, and suddenly, as if overcome by an access of tenderness, stooped and laid her face upon the gloved right hand, Margarete could not see whether to press her lips or cheek against it.

Involuntarily she started back from the window. The blood rushed hotly to her temples—she blushed for the old, white-haired lady, who forgot utterly her usual proud dignity in the presence of so young a creature.

Angrily she sprang from the windowsill. To what a pitiful, narrow state of things had she returned! Had she for this taken a journey to foreign lands and ancient times, and had she revelled in that which the human mind had created and executed in the way of a noble sense of beauty, in the freedom's thirst for ideals, to see here in the most disgusting servility how intellectually poor a human being can be? . . . No, the cage was too narrow! She would not sacrifice the most extreme edges of the wings of her soul, accustomed to freedom, to become used to it! . . . That which for the moment was passing through all modern life, domineering and unnerving servility, the worship of power, the undisguised fawning for the favor of influential personages, were now the ghosts in the Lamprecht house, against which she had to defend herself body and soul! Truly, "the beautiful lady with the rubies," who was rendered restless by her desperate, ardent love, was great beside these paltry souls!

CHAPTER IX.

THE carriage without rolled away. Margarete left the sitting-room, but she did not fly to meet her relatives as upon her arrival she had done in her first impulse; as if chilled she slowly descended the stairs leading to the hall.

Herbert was about to mount the stairs, and the counsellor had just recrossed the threshold into the hall. Upon his face still lay the glow of gratified pride at the honor which had come upon his house. He paused at the sight of Margarete, but immediately thereafter, with a cry of delight, he extended his arms and pressed his daughter to his breast. There was again a smile upon her lips.

"Ah, is it really you, Gretchen?" exclaimed Frau Amtsratin, who at this moment, in company with Reinhold, came in from out of doors. "Quite unexpected?" She dropped her train which she had been holding, held out her right hand to the young girl, and with dignified grace offered her cheek for a kiss. This her granddaughter did not seem to notice—she touched her grandmother's hand with her lips and then twined her arms about her brother's neck. . . . Yes, she had first been very angry with him! But he was her only brother, and he was ill; that miserable suffering robbed him of youth, of all the brilliance, the

charm of that celestially beautiful "eighteen years." . . . And how the heart throbbed in the slender form to which she clung! How he shuddered at the cool night air which blew in from the market-place!

"Let us go upstairs! The draughty hall is an uncomfortable place of meeting!" warned the counsellor. He again put his arm around Margarete's shoulder, and with her ascended the stairs, behind Herbert, who was a number of steps in advance.

"A big girl!" said papa, measuring the youthful form beside him with a proud, paternal glance.

"Yes, she has grown," said grandmama, who had followed slowly on Reinhold's arm. "Does she not remind you very much of Fanny's features and appearance, Balduin?"

"No, not at all! Gretel has a genuine Lamprecht face," he replied, his brow clouding over.

Upstairs in the large *salon* stood Aunt Sophie at a side table, counting into a basket the silver which had been used. Her whole face beamed as Margarete flew to her. "Your bed is ready in the same place in which as a child you slept over all your merry and stupid tricks," said she, after she had regained her breath, of which she had been deprived by the young girl's stormy embrace. "And the room adjoining is, too, quite cozy, just as you always liked it."

"A conspiracy!" said Frau Amtsratin, with an air of resentment. "Aunt Sophie was the confidante, and the rest of us had to be contented until the great moment had come!" She shrugged her shoulders, and sank into the nearest chair. "Had only this great moment come sooner, Grete! But your home-coming now is of no use—the court returns to M—— in two weeks! There can scarcely be a thought now of an introduction."

"You may be glad, dear grandmama! You would not get any honor from me. You can not fancy what a coward I am, what a terribly awkward creature I am, when I lose my courage! That is, in the presence of my dear old friends I should hold my own—they are kind and good and never wilfully intimidate a timid person. But the others ——" She paused and involuntarily ran her hand through her hair. "That is the reason I did not come, grandmama; the Christmas tree attracted me—Christmas downstairs in the sitting-room! I have seen enough of all the sweetmeat-figures and the masterworks of the bookbinder's art, which Aunt Elise buys and hangs on the tree. I want to spend one of those Christmas eves again on which it storms and snows without, and within in the warm room the nuts rattle upon the table, the gold-leaf flys about, and from the kitchen comes through the keyholes and the crevices of the door the scent of the

'Kringeln,' and all sorts of undefinable wonderful things. The best thing of all though will be lacking—Aunt Sophie's covered sewing-basket, out of which occasionally peeps an end of some doll's finery ; and unfortunately I am beyond picture-books. But I require from Barbe, as I always did, my gingerbread trooper——"

"Childishness!" rebuked Frau Amtsratin, irritably. "For shame, Grete! You have not come home one shade improved!"

"Yes, that is what Uncle Herbert has said, too."

"Not in that sense," said the young counsellor, coldly. He had entered the *salon* with the rest, but had not spoken up to this time, and was now standing by the *épergne*, where, with careful fingers, he pushed aside the flowers and fruit, in order the better to be able to see the wonderful workmanship of the silver merchantman. . . . Had he really not yet seen the old, familiar heirloom of the Lamprechts?

"What—have you already seen uncle?" asked Reinhold, looking up in surprise from the pear he was peeling "How is it possible?"

"A very easy matter, Holdchen, because a while since I was up here in person——"

"Not with the intention of entering?" cried Frau Amtsratin, in affright.

"With the Esquimaux curls and in that horrible black dress?" added Reinhold, with a comical gesture of horror. "You tricked yourself out wonderfully in your Berlin, Grete!"

Margarete laughed and looked down at her dress. "Do not worry, Reinhold, it is not the only one I have, nor my best one!" She critically examined the hem of her gown and shrugged her shoulders. "Poor dress! To be sure it is no longer new. It crept with me through pyramids and

catacombs, and has often been saturated with glacier-ice and mountain rain—the dear, old comrade. Now I have been ashamed of it and disparaged it. Uncle Herbert can testify that I did not think myself sufficiently fine to appear before the aristocratic company——"

"I pray you for Heavens sake, child, do me this one favor, and do not run your fingers through your hair in such a masculine manner!" interrupted her grandmama. "A dreadful habit! How came you to be possessed by the insane idea of having your hair cut short?"

"I was obliged to, grandmama, nor was it done without the shedding of a few secret tears, I cannot deny that. But it was a great trial, when, in the morning, it seemed as if I should never be able to finish plaiting my hair, and Uncle Theobald waited without at the door, pacing to and fro impatiently lest we might miss the train or the coach. So I made short work of it, when we were going to start for Olympus, and I seized the scissors. I would have shaved my head had it been necessary, I was so impatient and anxious to proceed myself. Besides it is not such a bad state of affairs, grandmama. My hair grows like weeds, and before you can turn around, I shall have quite a respectable knot of hair——"

"You can wait awhile," interpolated the old lady, dryly. "Nonsense, sheer nonsense!" she then burst forth, angrily. "Aunt Elise might have watched you better, and have prevented such doings!"

"Aunt? Ah, grandmama, then it *would* look bad! At least a hand's width shorter than this!" She held out at full length one of her curls, a roguish smile upon her face.

"Well, you must lead a fine, gypsylike life on your learned tours!" exclaimed the old lady, indignantly, with nervous agitation collecting a few crumbs on the table-cloth. "How my sister manages to insubordinate herself

to her husband's professional studies is incomprehensible to me. Where is then the wife's right to her own agreeable life-position? . . . Well, it is her business—as one makes one's bed, one must abide by it. . . . But, what is to be done? Look at this girl once more, Balduin! It may take years to render her presentable. I ask you, Grete, how will you manage to fasten a flower, not to mention a gem, in that short tangle? The ruby stars, for example, which were so becoming to your mother——"

"Ah, the 'rubies?' Pretty Dora in the red drawing-room has them on her toupet?" interrupted Margarete, inquiringly.

"Yes, Gretel, the same," confirmed her father, who up to this time had maintained silence, and now emptied a champagne-glass, replying instead of the grandmother. He was pale, but his eyes glowed beneath his brows, and his fingers encircled the glass as if they wanted to break it into atoms. "I love you dearly, child, and will give you what your heart desires ; but give up all thought of the ruby stars ; so long as *I* live they shall be worn in no other woman's hair!"

Frau Amtsratin passed her handkerchief over her eyes, and with the corners of her mouth drooping sadly, she looked down in her lap. "I see, I understand you, dear, dear Balduin," said she, in a sympathetic voice. "You loved Fanny dearly!"

A bitter smile flitted over his face, and he shrugged his broad shoulders as if he wished to shake off a nameless, inward impatience. With a clink he set down the glass, and with noisy steps entered the adjoining room, closing the door behind him.

"Poor man!" said Frau Amtsratin, in a low voice, raising her hand for a moment to her tear-dimmed eyes. "I am inconsolable at my awkwardness—I should never have

touched upon this never-healing wound! . . . And just today he was so gay, I might say 'proudly happy!' I have seen him smile today for the first time in years. Ah, yes, those were a couple of celestially beautiful hours, never to be forgotten for their beauty and so blessed! . . . Only one thing made me tremble, with anxiety dearest Sophie!" The soft clatter of the silver behind her ceased; Aunt Sophie listened dutifully to what was to come. "The service was so slow. My son-in-law will in such cases have to add more helping hands——"

"Heaven defend us, grandmama, what would it cost?" protested Reinhold. "We have our staff of servants, and we cannot have any more. Franz will have to bestir his lazy legs! In the future I shall have to prod him up!"

Grandmama made no answer. She took a couple of half-withered roses which Fraulein Heloise von Taubeneck had held in her hand, and had left at her place, and stuck her pointed nose therein—she never directly opposed her excitable grandson. "Another thought occurred to me in the course of the meal, dearest Sophie," said she, over the back of her chair after a moment's pause—"but was not the *ménu* composed in somewhat too course a manner? You know, dearest, a trifle too plain for our grand guests? And the roast-beef left much to be desired."

"You really need not worry, Frau Amtsratin," replied Aunt Sophie, with her merriest smile. "The bill of fare was what the season affords, and a rogue gives more than he has. The roast-beef was good, just as it always is upon our table downstairs. At Prince's Court they never buy all through the year such a fine, expensive piece of meat, so the court butcher tells me."

"Is that so! Hm!" The Frau Amtsratin cleared her throat, and hid her face for a moment in the roses. "Ah, that charming fragrance!" she lisped. "See here, Herbert,

this white tea-rose is something new from Luxemburg, so Fraulein von Taubeneck tells me. The duke ordered them especially for the Prince's Court."

The counsellor took the rose. He examined its formation, smelt it and gave it back to his mother without moving a muscle of his face. Who could have believed that this man had once taken and guarded such a white rose with ardor and passion, as if suddenly maddened, and would return it at no price?

Margarete could never understand this enigmatical occurrence, and now it was no longer a riddle to her—the former senior wrangler had evidently loved the beautiful maiden at the warehouse; it had been a first, enthusiastic "schoolboy love," which from his present position naturally he laughed at scornfully. The lyrical period was long since past, and the severe prose of dry, calculating intelligence had supplanted it.

But papa, who had just fled to the adjoining room with his grief, was another person! He could not forget. Her heart welled over with pity, and warm, filial affection—scarcely knowing that she did so, she softly opened the door, which he had closed behind him, and slipped into the room.

Herr Lamprecht was standing motionlessly in the dusky

window-niche, into which only one faint beam of the hanging-lamp fell, and seemed to be looking out upon the market-place. The thick carpet rendered the girl's light footsteps inaudible, so she suddenly stood behind the man engrossed with his own thoughts, and with a tender, caressing manner laid her hands upon his shoulders.

He turned as if the touch had been a blow of a fist, and stared with perturbed, almost wild eyes at his daughter's face. "Child," he breathed, you have a way of laying hands upon one——"

"Like my poor mama?"

He compressed his lips and turned away.

But she clung to him the more closely. "Let your Grete stay here, papa! Do not send her away!" she implored, softly and lovingly. "Grief is a wretched companion, with whom I shall not leave you alone. . . . Papa, I shall be twenty years old—quite an old girl, eh?—and I have traveled quite a great deal in the world. I have heard and seen much, I have opened my eyes to everything beautiful and grand, and have treasured up many a doctrine, as Aunt Sophie says. . . . And the world is so lovely——"

"Child, do I, too, not live in the world?" He pointed to the next room.

"But do you live among people who could really and truly help you up from your despondency of soul?"

He laughed a hard laugh. "No, certainly! Those last of all! But one can occasionally find diversion. To be sure trouble returns afterwards in double measure of misery, and plunges the poor soul again so much the deeper into its horrible gloom."

"Well, then I should not expose myself to it, papa!" said she, looking gravely up at him.

A mocking expression flitted across his dark face, while he stroked her hair with his hand. "My wise little girl,

you talk as you understand things—as if it were so easy! . . . You have 'been through the catacombs and pyramids,' and have, under your uncle's guidance, inquired in Troy and Olympus, into the life and existence of the ancient world, but of modern life you know very little. No one who wants to amount to anything can now get along with just one's own feeling of self-consciousness; there is needed besides some degree of sunshine coming from the highest circles." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Certainly, that is incomprehensible to me," said she, and the blood rose to her cheeks. "Nevertheless, I know more about modern life than you think for, papa. Uncle in Berlin will suffer nothing to remain in his house in doubt, in darkness; only clear heads are therein, and they speak out freely and from the heart. You see, and recently someone said: 'Ah, yes, they call it fanning class-hatred if we defend ourselves, and struggle against the threatening suppression! My soul is free from hatred—let those soar as high as it pleases them, I look on without envy; but they must not want to place themselves upon our bodies. That is, however, just the point; with their rise and strength the desire to trample us down increases. But even for that I do not hate; I ascribe it to the past. The aversion to helping the burghers—or, rather, the endeavor to prevent them as a body from gaining strength, runs in the blood. On the other hand I feel anger, unconquerable anger, against the venal standard-deserters of our ranks, who, out of servility and for the sake of personal advantages, fight against their own flesh and blood, and rave so much the more fanatically when they have to admit that those who have remained honorable scorn them.' So said Doctor ——."

"Only one of those for whom the grapes were sour," interpolated Herr Lamprecht, with smiling contempt;

"a moth which could not singe its wings simply because it could not approach the light near enough! He will swing with the tide yet, my dear Grete! We are the children of our age and not Spartans. And although there was something radically wrong, and although the flattery came to the fore in the worst, rude, repulsive manner, the world nevertheless will admire the decorated buttonhole, and respectfully call the pick-thank by the new title which he has obtained by sneaking. . . . I certainly do not belong to those servile ones—I want nothing, and I never needed to swing with the tide, for I have never felt the desire within me to pose to the conventionalized as a gladiator, and to make myself ridiculous with popular tirades. That is a matter of judgment; but the unconquerable shyness, the involuntary submission to that which is uttered and passed sentence upon in those higher regions lies in my blood. It is stronger than I—I cannot help it, I cannot escape it, with the best of wills, with all my strength!"

He suddenly left the young girl standing alone in the window-niche, and at almost a wild pace walked to and fro. "Yes, he who suddenly can shake off all—position

and results of education—and, as upon a lonely island unseen, can show himself as he is in his inmost soul, as he feels and suffers, ah, he——" He ceased with a passionate gesture.

This girl's energy and determination had evidently caused him to forget for a moment that it was his young daughter into whose ear he was pouring his grief.

"Go downstairs now, my child!" he said, forcing a composure he did not feel. "You must be tired and hungry—I am afraid no one has offered you anything to eat. Well, you shall not eat the remains of the feast. Aunt Sophie will set a nice tea-table for you downstairs, and you like to be with her the best! You are right, too, Gretel—she is gold, pure gold, and I cannot be persuaded otherwise, howsoever others may try. . . . What a warm hand you have, child! And how your usually so pale cheeks glow! Ah, you see, brave little citizeness, politics——"

"Politics? Ah, papa, I am only a girl, a little, stupid one at that—what have politics to interest me? I was but quoting!" She smiled roguishly. "You surely do not think that Grete wants to meddle with the mens' craft? God forbid! But I say," she continued, gravely, "it is a question here of general humanity, of right and wrong, of moral strength and cowardice, of true pride and baseness. . . . And were your description, the sign of our time, to be restricted forever, ah, one had far rather at once be a mummy of Memphis or Thebes, and have lived centuries ago! But it is not true!" She energetically shook her head. "'Notwithstanding all we live in a great era, although we have to struggle in the midst of a powerful surf,' Uncle Theobald always says. 'The good and the true will come to the top, and the loathsome bubbles, which the struggle now drives to the surface, will not always glitter and dazzle the weak!' And you should not

show your feelings? You should shut yourself up out of fear of mankind? You, an independent man, should not be allowed to be happy and contented in your own way? Of what use are the proofs of grace and favor from without if inwardly you are starving——"

He abruptly drew her under the hanging-lamp, bent back her head and looked keenly into the eyes frankly and fearlessly upturned to his. "Is this clearsightedness, or are they watching me? . . . No, my Gretel has remained honest and true! There is no falseness about her!"

Again he flung his arm about her form. "My brave girl! I believe you would be the only bold one in the family who would cling to me, were the world to declare me an outcast——"

"Of course, papa, more than ever!"

"Would you help me to overcome a miserable weakness?"

"To be sure, with all my might, papa! Only try me! I have courage enough for two. Here is my hand on an offensive and defensive alliance!"

A pretty smile, half-roguish, half-serious, hovered about her lips.

He kissed her brow, and a few moments later she re-entered the *salon.*

Aunt Sophie was no longer there. She had gone downstairs with her silver-basket and was hurriedly arranging the tea-table. The servant was just putting out the lights and Reinhold was taking the sweetmeats piece by piece out of the crystal dishes, and arranging them in various glass-boxes to be "locked up." But Frau Amtsratin sat comfortably ensconced among plush cushions behind a table—because it was chilly upstairs on account of the continued airing, while here it was still warm and cozy, as she said, playing her usual evening *solitaire.* . . . So grandmama and brother had not much time for her who had returned home, and their "good-night" sounded quite abstracted and perfunctory.

The young girl did not regret it, not at all! She was glad to have escaped so easily—she was through upstairs. . . . But as she passed through the shadowy hall, someone was standing at the window, apparently looking down into the court—it was Herbert! She had not given him a thought; head and heart were more than full of the enigmatical condition in which she had just seen her father. To her clear, resolute mind such a morbidly mysterious difference of soul was something quite strange, such a man's soul in its contrariety would be hard to understand. . . . Was the man over there now in the enjoyment of position and respect, perhaps, too, for one moment actuated by a memory, which caused him to look

over towards the gallery, where once beautiful Blanka's golden hair had gleamed through the green leaves and tendrils?

"Good-night, Margarete!" said he, at this moment, in a different tone from that employed by the two who were busy in the *salon.*

"Good-night, uncle!"

CHAPTER X.

THE "courtyard-room" had always had a certain fascination for Margarete. It was situated on the ground-floor of the haunted wing, and communicated with the childrens' former sleeping-apartment. Another shadowy corridor like the one upstairs ran back of the rooms, and separated—likewise turning the corner—the kitchen from the sitting-room. The two stories had no connection—"fortunately" there was no flight of stairs; therefore, there needed to be no fear that the white lady or she of cobweby raiment might take a notion to flit down, as Barbe always said. The suite on the lower floor was divided in the centre by a door which led into the court-yard, an enormous, heavy door, with massive knockers, and flanked on both sides by stone figures in basso-relievo. Broad steps led from it to the gravel-walk which intersected the lawn and ran direct to the well.

In the "courtyard room" was furniture of the roccoco period only, which belonged to Aunt Sophie. It was highly polished, the brass ornaments shone, and old Meissen china, cemented in many places, stood upon the tops of the chests of drawers and upon the writing-desk, with its high top full of innumerable little drawers. The room was, so to speak, Aunt Sophie's jewel-casket, her "best" room, cozy and painfully neat, as rooms always are which belong to a happy old maid who enjoys life. Now all the finely-decorated vases and ornaments standing around, even the rose-jars were filled with immense bouquets out of the garden at the gate—the gay borders had to be thinned out in honor of the home-returning

guest—and upon the white floor, never "desecrated" by a coat of varnish, lay a new, warm carpet, which Aunt Sophie had bought with her own money.

And her darling upon entering, when the lamplight fell upon all the old maid's beloved, familiar family relics, flung herself on her neck and almost suffocated her. The bed, too, was standing in the usual place, and Aunt Sophie sat beside it a long time and talked—her words were loving and gay, not a discordant tone should mar their reunion. Every pause made by the merry, humor-permeated voice was filled out by the old, monotonous song of the splashing, running water in the court; several times could be heard the sharp creaking of the warehouse gate, then the *cè-devant* romp, who had roved the wide, wide world, and had brought home a head and heart laden with booty, lay sleeping as serenely among her pillows as if she had walked only to Dambach and back.

Ah, beloved Dambach! Now the going back and forth would begin! Grandpapa was not at the dinner—he had, "as usual, avoided the select company for good reasons," as Frau Amtsratin crossly remarked. So the next morning Margarete started out and rambled among the dewy stubblefields, although papa assured her that the old gentleman would be in in the afternoon to go hunting with him.

The meeting at Dambach was much more delightful than the young girl had dreamed of in Berlin. Yes, she had remained his pet! The grand old man, with the sturdy form and rough manner, was quite gentle and moved; he would have liked to have set her like a doll upon his large palm in order to show her to his factory hands who came up. She stayed to dinner, and the foreman's wife had to make her finest omelet, but they did not wait for her still more celebrated coffee; promptly at the

"AH, YES, GRETEL, HAVE WE NOT GROWN ARISTOCRATIC OUT HERE?" ASKED GRANDPAPA. (P. 131.)

time appointed the ardent old sportsman slung over his shoulder gun and game-bag, and they set out on the high-road.

Off to one side lay the Prince's Court. The atmosphere and the light were so clear, that the groups of flowers could be plainly seen. Surely the tiny castle had been greatly improved! Formerly it had lain at the foot of the hill like a sleepy thorn-rose—half-hidden under the protecting canopy of the forest, which today wore the yellow and crimson autumnal tints—without color or brilliance and unheeded. Now it had risen and opened its eyes; it glimmered and glistened among the dark nut-trees as if a handful of diamonds had been strewn there—the old, faded blinds, which were never opened, had disappeared, and new panes of glass were in the large stone windowframes.

"Ah, yes, Gretel, have we not grown aristocratic out here?" asked grandpapa, pointing in the direction of the castle. The man of seventy walked along like a giant! The road cracked under his feet, and his white moustache gleamed like silver against the brown, sensible face, which from one side was rendered quite awe-inspiring by the scar across the cheek, which scar was the result of a duel fought in days gone by. "Yes, aristocratic and foreign!" he continued, "although the mother is a Pomeranian, and the daughter on her father's side has not a bit of 'John Bull' or 'Parlez-vous francais' in her veins—that makes no difference!—they cook and eat in the English style, and talk French according to notes. Ah, the old nut-trees will stare and blush to think that in their old days they stand there like stupid peasant boys, and that in their youth they did not become plane-trees or something more elegant."

Margarete laughed.

"Yes, you laugh, and your grandfather laughs, too! I am laughing at the dust, which the two womens' petti-

coats over there"—he described a wide circle with his outstretched arm—"stir up—the ape's comedy, pure and simple, I can tell you! . . . 'Have you been to Prince's Court?' there say here, and 'have you been introduced?' there! And one is scarcely recognized if one has not been, like the other, at the large dinner-party, and another stares at one nonplussed, as if one were crazy, when one says that one has refused with regret, but that one prefers to remain at home. Ah, Gretel, one never ceases learning! I fancied I was living among men of pure Thuringian stock, of the true coin, and now the old grumblers squeeze themselves into frock-coats, pour lavender-water or some other perfume"—he only half-suppressed an energetic "faugh!"—"upon their handkerchiefs, and affectedly sip a cup of tea and eat a slice of bread and butter. I wish the Burgundy tipplers would strangle on it!"

Margarete cast a sidelong glance at him; she could find no trace of his usual merriment, but honest, manly anger glowed from under his bushy white, contracted brows. She clung to his arm, put out her right foot and tried to accommodate herself to his military pace.

He smiled and looked down at her. The tip of her elegant shoe looked too comical beside his enormous hunting-boots. "What poor little walking-sticks! And she wants to put on airs, too!" he scoffed. "Come, give it up, Gretel! That young woman over there"—he pointed back to the Prince's Court—"lives in state; zounds, one has to respect her! Surely you two might have been changed in your cradles—such a tiny pedal extremity, so much against police regulation, is not suited to you, and in a person of blue-blood a large foot is always an incomprehensible base trick of nature! But her 'Grace' is pretty otherwise—let us give her her due! Red and white, like milk and blood; fair—you brown little May-bug

will have to creep into your hole by the side of her; tall," he raised his hand almost as high as his head; "heavy and plump, a veritable Pomeranian, self-contained and phlegmatic! Such a greyhound as this one tripping beside me, does not amount to anything."

"Ah, grandpapa, the greyhound enjoys her life just as it is—do not worry about that!" laughed the maiden. "Moreover, those poor little walking-sticks have done excellent service, and I doubt if your large seven-league boots could have competed with my light feet on the Alps. Ask Uncle Theobald at Berlin!"

With these words she happily changed the subject. The old man was quite angry; he overwhelmed his future daughter-in-law with all the sarcasm at his command. His relations with her grandmama were for the time being on this account probably less peaceable than usual. And he was no doubt right, his keen judgment seldom failed; but his granddaughter could and dared not pour oil upon the water, so she intuitively told about the hospice on the Saint Bernard, where, with her uncle and aunt, she had spent the night during a terrible snowstorm, of all manner of adventures in Italy and so forth; and the old gentleman listened to it all until the warehouse gate closed behind them, and the elm-leaves which had fallen in the court-yard crackled beneath their feet.

They had just entered the hall of the main dwelling, when a tiny dog slipped through the front door, which was slightly ajar. He barked at those who had entered in a high, sharp voice.

Margarete knew the little beast. Years before Herr Lenz had returned from a journey, and had brought it with him; it looked as if it had been a princess' lap-dog. Blue silk ribbons peeped from its shaggy coat, and on chilly days it had run about the gallery wearing a hand-

somely embroidered purple cover. Notwithstanding all coaxing, it had never come down to the children in the courtyard; the decorator's family cared for it as for a child.

It now ran in, and immediately the door was pushed open farther, and a boy followed it. But almost at the same moment the window of the counting-house which opened upon the hall was thrown up, and Reinhold's head was thrust out.

"You miserable rascal, have I not forbidden you to go through here?" he called to the boy. "Is not the warehouse doorway wide enough for you? . . . This is the family's house, and you have absolutely nothing to do here, as little as your folks! Have I not already told you this? Do you not understand German, silly boy?"

"How can I help it if Philine runs away from me and runs in here? I wanted to catch her, but I could not because I have the basket on my arm!" apologized the child, with a slightly foreign accent. I know German very well; I understand all that you say," he added, in an insulted but defiant tone. He was a beautiful child; he had a genuine Apollo-head, framed in short brown curls, his face glowed with freshness and good health, and his head sat firmly and proudly upon a strong neck. But all these charms did not seem obvious to the pale young man with the cold stare and the scolding voice, the young man standing at the counting-house window.

And now Philine took it into her head to rush up the steps leading to the sitting-room, as if she were at home there.

Reinhold stamped his foot, while the boy fearfully followed the barking wrong-doer several paces.

"Now clear out of here as quickly as you can, boy," came angrily from the window, "or I shall come out and beat you and your dog soundly!"

"Well, well, we shall see, dear sir! There are others here who will be able to prevent that!" said the old Amtsrat, with two strides reaching the window.

Reinhold involuntarily quailed at the unexpected sight of his grandfather.

"You are a fine fellow!" scoffed the old gentleman—vexation and sarcasm evident in his voice. "You are scolding like a washerwoman, and putting on airs in your

father's house as if you were the chief in the counting-house. Come, let your feathers grow first, and your beak be cleansed! . . . Why should not the little fellow go through here, eh? Do you think he will wear out your valuable flagstones?"

"I—I cannot stand the barking, it affects my nerves——"

"Don't talk to me about your nerves, boy! Such whining is disgusting to me! Are you not ashamed to act as though you had been reared in an old woman's home? 'My nerves!'" he mimicked, testily—"ah, may——" He suppressed the rest of the oath, pulled at his gun-strap, and pressed his hat with its black cock's-feather more firmly on his brow.

In the meantime Margarete drew nearer. "Why, Reinhold," said she, reproachfully "what has the boy done to you?"

"He? To me?" he interrupted her, scornfully; his courage had returned. "Well, really, that was the only thing lacking, that the people from the house at the rear should directly attack us! . . . Wait until you have been here a couple of weeks, Grete, you will be just like me; you will open your eyes, Miss Wisdom! If we do not watch out, there will not be a spot in the house upon which that fellow there"—he pointed to the boy, who was putting his basket on the floor, in order the better to seize the refractory dog—"would not set his foot! . . . Papa has grown strangely careless and indolent. He suffers the boy to loiter in our court and to spread out his copybooks under the elms—in our favorite spot, Grete, where we, his own children, prepared our lessons! And several days ago with my own eyes I saw him as he passed lay a new book upon the table——"

"Envious fellow!" growled the Amtsrat, angrily.

"You may think what you like, grandpapa!" burst forth

the youth. "But I am economical, like all the earlier representatives of our firm, and I grow furious when money is squandered. Nor does one make presents to people whom one pays. Now, that the books are open to me, now I know that old Lenz has never paid one penny of rent for the warehouse. In addition he is a very slow workman, so slow that he scarcely earns his salt. He should be paid by the piece; but papa gives him year in and year out his three hundred dollars, it matters not whether he has delivered only one plate or not, and the business is injured greatly. . . . If I had the power only one single day, order should be restored; I would remove the old slow-coach——"

"Well, then it is very fortunate that such green hands have to be quiet, until——"

"Yes until the chief's place in the counting-house is vacant," completed the counsellor, who suddenly entered. In all probability he had seen his father-in-law and daughter cross the court, and had hastily got himself in readiness, in order not to keep the prompt old gentleman waiting. He was in hunting costume, and probably in coming down he had heard the greater part of the conversation at the counting-house window—there was something violent in his sudden appearance, and Margarete saw how nervously his lower lip quivered as he spoke. He glanced at the window; he shrugged his shoulders merely, and said, in an almost jovial tone: "Unfortunately papa still has possession of this chief's position, and so the very shrewd little son may perhaps have to defer his 'clearing out' for quite a long time."

With these words he extended his hand in greeting to his father-in-law.

The window was quietly closed, and immediately after the dark woolen curtain was hanging there as if not the

shadow of a human being had touched it. Young Hotspur had probably returned to his desk.

Meanwhile the boy had succeeded in capturing his self-willed Philine; Aunt Sophie, who came out of the sitting-room with a basket filled with pastry, had helped him by standing in the way. Now his little feet pattered down the steps; in one arm he had the dog, and on the other he again hung his basket—his face looked quite put out.

"Have you been crying, my boy?" asked the counsellor, bending over him. Margarete thought she had never heard his voice so soft and tender as it was on asking the sympathetic question which escaped the usually so cold, reserved man.

"I? Of what are you thinking?" returned the boy, quite insulted. "A real boy does not cry!"

"Bravo! You are right, young sir!" laughed the Amtsrat, in surprise. "You are indeed a fine fellow!"

The counsellor took the dog, which was making every effort to free himself, and stood him upon his legs. "He will follow you when you cross the court," said he, soothingly, to the child. "But were I in your place I should be ashamed to go through the street with the basket." He looked angrily at the basket on the tiny arm, as if vexed to see the ideal form burdened with it. "It is not suitable for a gymnasiast; your companions will ridicule you."

"Oh!—let them try it!" His face grew scarlet, and he threw back his handsome head as boldly and energetically as a fighting-cock. "I can surely fetch rolls for my grandmother? Our waiting-maid is ill, and grandmama has a bad foot; if I do not go, she will have nothing for her coffee, and I care nothing for the stupid boys."

"That is kind of you, Max," said Aunt Sophie. She took a handful of almond-cakes out of her basket, and offered them to him.

He looked pleasantly up at her, but he did not take them. "Thank you, I thank you very much, Fraulein," said he, embarrassed himself at his refusal, and passing his hand through his curls. "But you know, I never eat sweet things—they are only for girls!"

The Amtsrat burst into hearty laughter; his entire face beamed, and suddenly he raised the child, together with his basket, from the floor, and heartily kissed his blooming cheek. "Yes, he is certainly of different wood! Zounds, he would be to my taste!" cried he, as he released the boy from his powerful, strong grasp. "How comes this little wonder of the world in that old garret, the old warehouse?"

"He is a little Frenchman," said Aunt Sophie. "Eh, is not Paris your home?" she asked the child.

"Yes. But mama died, and——"

"See there—your Philine has escaped again!" cried the counsellor. "Run after her! She will go upstairs to the old lady who lives there!"

The boy rushed up the steps.

"Yes, his parents are both said to be dead," said Aunt Sophie, half-aloud to the old gentleman.

"But that is not true!" protested the boy from the steps. "My papa is not dead, but far away, mama always said—I believe, far away across the sea."

"And do you not long to see him?" asked Margarete.

"I have never seen papa," replied he, half-dryly, half in a tone of naive surprise at the fact that he should be expected to long for something of which he had no conception.

"That is a nonsensical story? The deuce!—Hm!" growled the Amtsrat, almost perplexed, swinging his right hand as if he had burned his fingers. "Then he is the child of one of Lenz's daughters?"

"I cannot say—as far as I know, there is but one,"

replied Aunt Sophie. "What was your mother's name, my boy?"

"She was called mama and Apolline," answered the boy, curtly. He was evident weary of being questioned, and tried to pass those standing by. Philine had finally decided to seek the proper means of exit, and ran yelping into the court.

"Now run, little one!" said the counsellor, who during all this had paced to and fro in silence, but impatiently, between the house and courtyard door, as if the ground burnt his soles, and he feared he should have to sacrifice some of his pleasure of the hunt. "Be careful, your rolls will be too late—the coffee will have been drunk long before!"

"Ah, it has not been made yet!" laughed the boy. "I have first to gather the kindlings and split them."

"It seems to me they make a Cinderella of you over there," said the counsellor, while his glowing, dark eyes sought the warehouse.

"Do you think that will harm the little fellow?" inquired his father-in-law. "When I was an urchin of nine I too prepared the kindlings for the kitchen, and was around the fields and stable like a shepherd boy—does any of it cling to the man? . . . What sort of a future has such a poor little wretch? There is something out of the ordinary in this, I can see; and if 'they' will ever again cross the sea and perform their duty and discharge their debt, that is a question—promises in such things at the present day are not worth much. Well, and the old man there"—he pointed toward the warehouse—"will have no difficulty in dragging his money-box with him; so the Mosje will have to rough it, and employ all his strength to keep his head above water——"

"I shall take him into the counting-house later on,"

interrupted the counsellor, with strange haste; as he spoke he laid his hand involuntarily with a protecting gesture upon the brown curly head, as if it made his heart ache to think that this beautiful child might become stranded in the struggle for existence.

"Well, those are words which please me, Balduin! But you must first control the one in there better"—he nodded his head in the direction of the counting-house window, behind which at this moment the folds of the curtain stirred treacherously—"or else there will be murder."

He patted his granddaughter's cheek tenderly, and extended his hand to Aunt Sophie in farewell. "Until we meet again, cousin Sophie!" He always addressed her thus. "I shall spend the night again in my town-crib—I should like to spend the evening with Herbert and Gretel. If you please, inform the severe lady upstairs of my intention!" said he, with a solemn, ironical bow, stepping out upon the market-place.

The counsellor stood for a moment as if rooted to the

spot. On turning around he saw his daughter follow the boy far out into the court, run both of her hands through his wealth of curls and kiss the laughing little rogue. It was a charming picture, attractive enough to make anyone forget his purpose.

"Well, she has taken him under her protection already!" said Barbe, who was working at the kitchen-window, and who could see the group in the court, to the housemaid with a smile. "I thought our dear Gretel would not join forces with Reinhold and the one upstairs. The little rascal with his pretty, curly head bewitches everybody who has a heart and not a stone in his breast. There he runs along, laughing heartily at the joke that the lovely maiden seized him by the hair! There is something beautiful about youth! You must admit it yourself, Jette—our life is quite different when such young folks come among us old Hussars! It refreshes us!" She took several swallows of her beloved coffee, and wiped the perspiration from her brow. It was warm in the kitchen. The large roasting-jack and baking machine were hot, and the autumnal air was filled with the fumes of the kitchen—baking was going on as busily as if a whole company of famished soldiers was coming from the maneuvers; however, it was all but in honor of the only daughter of the house who had returned home.

CHAPTER XI.

"IT is true, Gretel—you are just the same child that you always were, when you followed me holding on to my skirts with both hands, quite indifferent as to whether we were going to the garret or the cellar!" said Aunt Sophie, half-laughing, half-vexed, late on the afternoon of the next day. She was standing in the red *salon* of the *bel-étage*, and the servant was handing down to her the pictures from the walls. All the doors of the suite leading into the hall were open; the daylight entered through curtainless windows, and tiny clouds of dust danced gaily about the hall. New hangings, new shades, portières and carpets were to be put in the rooms in anticipation of the expected brilliant social season—that caused a terrible commotion weeks in advance.

"There is nothing up here for you, Miss Obstinacy!" repeated her aunt, more emphatically, warding off the young girl, who had taken up her post upon the threshold. "It is draughty and dusty, dreadfully dusty, I tell you! I should like to know where that horrid gray powder comes from! The whole year we chase about up here with duster and dusting-brush, as if we were paid extra, and now such clouds! Those old folks up there"—she pointed to a number of oil-paintings hanging upon the wall—"must shake it out of their wigs and chignons. . . . And it will not improve your poodle-head either, Gretel!"

"It will do no harm, aunt! I shall remain here, and before you are aware of it you will have both of my hands in the folds of your gown. We are living in an era of confusion, a modern building of the tower of Babel—only

the circumstances are reversed ; we are building downward, in the pitchy darkness of night. One scarcely knows what is right, what wrong, what straight or crooked, allowable or prohibited, for the famous downward builders have brought about such a salmagundi of ideas. And so a young thing like myself is fortunate in being able to cling to a reliable steersman, and such an one are you, aunt!"

"Go away! I thought you would have your wits about you, and would not let them impose an X for a U upon you. . . . There, help me—if you cannot be got rid of; take the other end of pretty Dore—I cannot carry her alone!"

The lady with the rubies was indeed heavy. She stood in a carved, richly-gilded frame, formed of a broad ribbon wreathed with roses and myrtle. The lady held, too, indolently, a couple of myrtle branches between her slender fingers—she had been painted thus when a bride. The picture was three-quarter length, representing the young woman in an emerald-colored brocaded robe, interwoven with silver flowers—but what a woman that was!

Margarete had often looked up at the portrait in childish curiosity ; but what had she then understood of the animation of a form, of the depicting power of the brush? It had only occurred to her that the high coiffure was a deep black, while all the rest of the Lamprecht wives and daughters wore their hair powdered snow-white. Now the young girl kneeled on the floor in front of the picture, and thought in the presence of this wonderful wealth of hair, from whose raven masses the five painted ruby-stars really glittered, and from which a few loose ringlets hung over her dainty breast, that this woman had protested boldly and energetically against the prevailing fashion and the defamation of her proudest ornament. Now, too, it became clear to her that the popular voice should have

imputed to her apparitions after death. Her contemporaries, who had really seen the fire sparkle in those fine dark eyes, and in whose presence this dainty creature, graceful to her very fingertips, had lived and breathed, could not believe in the death and extinction of such charms.

There was something peculiar about this old German house, with its traditions, which were connected with old French furniture and animated every corner! She had felt more grave, but certainly not more mystical, on treading the marble corridors of old Venetian palaces than she now did in the house of her fathers, where the boards creaked beneath her tread, and the forms of the old linen-dealers upon the wall stood out of the semi-darkness with spectrelike animation, their ranks interrupted only by one of the silent barred doors, behind which many a secret probably slept.

Papa had indeed once broken the silence which had reigned there for many years, and had established himself in the defamed rooms in order to cure the superstitious servants of their fear of ghosts, and whenever he returned home, at that time only for a few weeks, he preferred to remain in his "tusculum." But in two years' time all this changed ; the view in the silent court may not have pleased him for a permanent thing. After an absence of almost

six months he sent word one day from Switzerland that his deceased wife's boudoir should be prepared for his occupancy. Margarete could still remember that at that period, to her sorrow, the pink upholstery, the water-colors and rosewood furniture were moved into another room, and replaced by a dark set. And when he arrived, he had his late wife's oil-painting, the only thing which had been left in its place upon the wall, immediately hung in the adjoining *salon*—the sight of the picture, as well as the whole arrangement, seemed to reopen his old wound, grandmama had said, and, therefore, she agreed with everything done. But the rooms in the side-wing were again arranged as they once had been under his especial supervision—not the slightest object of its modern furnishing was left therein ; then it was aired and scrubbed, with his own hands he drew the curtains, and, as formerly, took charge of the key.

Margarete stooped and looked through the large keyhole into the room with the magnificent frescoes. The air within was like the atmosphere of a church, and the faded, transparent bouquets of poppies on the silken curtains cast a faint pink light upon the floor and walls within! Poor, beautiful Dore! Worshiped during her life, she had paid the penalty of her happiness obtained by defiance with an early death ; and now Psyche's wings were tied eternally, so that she had to flutter fearfully against the two narrow walls of the dark corridor!

Faintly there arose within the young girl the remembrance of the veiled lady in white. The impressions made upon her in her travels, the intellectual life in the home of her celebrated uncle had rather eradicated this episode of her childhood from her memory, so much so that she had frequently thought to herself the whole affair could be traced back to the beginning of her severe nervous illness

of that time. But at this moment, as she stood at the very door through which the "apparition" flitted, and as she saw the enormous clothespress in front of which she paused, and behind which she, Margarete, was concealed, the occurrence began to assume again clearer outlines, and she felt as if she must at that moment hear again the tap of the fleeing heels.

In the press was the key, one of an enormous bunch. Margarete opened the door, which was only leaned to, and saw that Aunt Sophie had stood a number of things on the upper shelf that they might be safely stowed away while the rooms were being renovated. On the hooks, however, hung her great-grandmother's brocaded gowns in rows, as she had often seen them years before. The bright colors gleamed therein as in a bed of tulips and hyacinths, and between them glittered gold and silver textures, and heavy lacework and galloon—an enormous stock—which the pride and the piety of the old manufacturing house allowed to crumble untouched in the press. Far back in the darkest corner shimmered a bit of the emerald train in which beautiful Frau Dore had had her portrait painted. Margarete drew the treasure-trove into the light. Yes, Aunt Sophie was right when she asserted that in days gone by one could buy better things for one's money. The real silver of the woven flowers glittered, the green was perfectly fresh and unfaded, and only in its folds was the thick silk broken.

Frau Dore's youthful heart must once have beaten against a tight, narrow bodice. Margarete thought it would fit her, too, and suddenly "merry Gretel's childish head" gained the upperhand. Quite near the wall, too, was a high pier-glass; it stood opposite the pictures. It did not frighten the daring young girl that it was the tall, proud form of great-grandfather Justus which the mirror

reflected. She loosened the long gorget, and tied her locks high above her brow in a toupet. The star-shaped brooch, and the ear-rings and cuff-buttons to match of Bohemian garnets had to take the place of the ruby stars, and just for a first fleeting glance they answered the purpose sufficiently.

It was strange that nature should again have moulded a form as exact in height and slenderness of build as the one which almost a century before had walked through the Lamprecht house. The bodice fit the young girl's figure faultlessly, and the skirt with its silver *tablier* reached just to her feet.

She was startled herself when she had fastened the last buckle of the stomacher, and stepped once more before the mirror. She, too, cast a shy glance to one side, where at her shoulder the eyes of Justus Lamprecht gleamed in the darkness of the corridor, and his hand with its rings rested as plastically on the large folio as if the next moment it would detach itself from the canvas and reach forth for the presumptuous girl. . . . Well, the frivolous masquerade should speedily end ; in a few minutes the gown would be again hanging in the press, but certainly not until Aunt Sophie had seen the modern ancestress.

With steps involuntarily slackened she stepped out of the corridor. The train rustled over the rough boards—in this state-raiment, which rattled like a coat-of-mail, noiseless motion would have been impossible to beautiful Dore.

The servant came out of the large *salon* just then, and walked through the hall to the door. At the sound of rustling garments he turned his head innocently, and immediately at one comical bound cleared the door in horror, closing it noisily behind him.

Margarete laughed at the effect, and crossed the threshold of the large *salon ;* but she drew back in embarrass-

ment, for her aunt was not alone, Uncle Herbert was standing beside her at the window.

Yesterday afternoon at the same time it would have been a matter of great indifference to her whether her uncle had stood there or not. He had never been included in those at home of whom she had especially thought or for whom she had yearned, and her first meeting on her return had awakened no interest in her for him. However, since the night before, when she had spent several hours upstairs at her grandparents' in his company, she felt for him a sort of moral disgust. Not that she had allowed herself to be influenced by the enthusiastic adoration of her grandmama for her successful son, or by the unmistakable respect shown by her father to his young brother-in-law; she knew that both of these, alas, paid tribute but to the good-fortune which seemed to follow him, and saw in him one of the elect, because those of high rank associated with him as with an equal—that did not attract her; but grandpapa, who was usually so upright, incorruptible, had puzzled her. It was scarcely credible that he could be utterly blind to the way in which his son was succeeding, that he did not know what powers helped him over obstacles which others could only overcome after years of exertion of their own strength. And yet inward satisfaction and paternal pride had yesterday beamed in the old man's eyes. He repeatedly declaimed against modern efforts which never inquired as to the purity of the means of attaining an end; fawning, crookedness and hypocrisy were again the order of the day, and the honest German mind must blush in the face of the "neighborfolks" who likewise would see how these sneaking, deformed figures sought to obtain a foothold on the great chess-board.

In his blinded paternal love did he not feel the thorn in his own flesh, or did the young counsellor understand how

AUNT SOPHIE TURNED, AND FOR A MOMENT SEEMED SPEECHLESS; THEN SHE CLASPED HER HANDS AND LAUGHED. (P. 151.)

to throw sand in his eyes? He had sat by as calmly as if this anthema were quite in order. Not one single time had the flush of embarrassment or of shame risen to his face; he smoked his cigar and watched the blue rings of smoke thoughtfully with his eyes; but if he spoke, his words were always "fulminatory," as Aunt Sophie was in the habit of expressing herself.

The main substance of his character might be what it would, that did not concern her; it only vexed her that he should pass judgment so directly upon his dead sister's two children—the exemplary, diligent Reinhold of former days seemed to him to have lost none of his virtues, while he evidently today attributed no good qualities to the "romp!" And was he not right? Reinhold was rising in his profession, he was shrewd intelligence personified—and in her head today flitted all sorts of carnival jests, as figures showed. With the glow of vexation on her face, she tried to retire unseen. The backs of both were towards her; they appeared to be looking at some objects lying on the windowsill, and the rattling of the outside door might have drowned the rustle of the train. Now again all was so still that the first backward movement of the young girl attracted the attention of those standing at the window. Aunt Sophie turned, and for a moment seemed speechless; then she clasped her hands and laughed.

"You almost succeeded, Gretel! Ah, yes, it would have been a joke if your old aunt had been frightened. Well, it was nothing of that kind, but it sent a thrill through and through me." Involuntarily she pressed her right hand to her breast. "For God's sake do not let Barbe see you! . . . Well, well, how much you resemble poor Dore in that guise, and yet you have not a drop of her blood in your veins! And your face, too, is quite

different with your tiny nose and the dimples in your cheeks——"

"Certain lines about the mouth and eyes and the carriage of the head make the resemblance," interpolated the "Landrat." "Lovely Dorothea with her love of opposition coped boldly with the preconceived opinions of the world, as is shown by her unpowdered toupet and her marriage. She must have possessed stubborness and arrogance in the highest degree, and these qualities of character give an especial stamp."

Margarete imperturbably raised her eyes to the mirror hanging opposite her, which reflected her entire form. "Yes, it is true there is a great deal of childishness in the stupid masquerade! But it affords me pleasure, much pleasure! And although all the world may turn up its nose, it was nevertheless delightful to slip into our 'white lady's' fine clothes! . . . And it is likewise time that I gladly dispute the preconceived opinions of the world—a state crime, which will cause law-abiding citizens' hair to stand on end. So you are quite right, Uncle Herbert, to read me a lecture, if it be clothed in the figurative form of satire." She re-arranged the fine Brussels lace on the stomacher and sleeves as calmly and carefully as if a moment before she had not lost her self-possession, and stepped into the room. "I only fear that you will succeed no better with me now than you did at the time when my exercise-books and repetition of the French vocabulary irritated your nerves," she continued, shrugging her shoulders. "I write today as if I were writing with a hedge-pole, and I never air my little stock of Thuringian French before Parisians."

"Come, do not exaggerate! It is not as bad as that," said Aunt Sophie, laughing. "Come here and look at the accident we have had!" She took the pieces of an antique

vase from the windowsill, and laid them on the large table in the middle of the room. "I take such excellent care of the things up here, and up to this time have had no accident with the breakable ornaments; and now that stupid fellow Friedrich, has knocked this vase off the consol-table. And I could not even scold him; the poor blockhead's teeth chattered with fright, and it was comical to see him take his few groschens out of his pocket in payment of the damage. I do not remember how many ducats those few bits of clay are said to have cost, but I know it was a fabulous sum. Cousin Gotthelf, your grandfather, Gretel, brought this vase from Italy."

Margarete advanced to the table. "Imitation, and a poor one at that!" said she, positively, after examining it. "Grandpapa was cheated. You may throw the pieces into the ash-barrel, aunt, without any hesitation! Barbe's beloved coffee pot is of the same ware."

"That sounds as decided as if Uncle Theobald himself were speaking," said the counsellor, who was standing at the window. "I now see that he must already have missed his fellow-worker——"

"Fellow-worker!" She laughed. "You mean his ministering spirit, an earth-gnome! A sort of elf who attends to the stove in the library without making a noise, which

no servant can do; who now and then makes a cup of strong coffee, and, unperceived, sets it down when the great thinker is working hard; who occasionally like a lizard glides up and down the library step-ladder, providing him with his supply of books, in order to lighten his 'source studies'—such an elf am I! . . . And if here and there some of the intelligence and knowledge which one inhales there with the air has clung to me, it is no wonder. But the confused chaos here is not systematically arranged or really useful." She tapped her brow with her finger. "Who would require it of a girl's brain, eh, uncle?"

With a smile she laid the remnants of the vase on the table.

"How do you know that Uncle Theobald misses my trifling services?" she asked, abruptly, raising her eyes.

"You may know. My mother has had a letter from Aunt Elise. You are not only missed in uncle's study, but, too, in aunt's drawing-room, where the friends of the family assemble, and your return is anxiously looked for. . . . Herr von Billingen Wackewitz is the *enfant gate* in this *salon*, is he not?"

"For what reason do you think so?" A sudden bright flush suffused her cheeks, while her brows contracted slightly.

He did not remove his piercing eyes from her face. "I will tell you that I would like to wager that aunt's long epistle did not contain any five lines in which the handsome Mecklenburger did not figure."

"He is Aunt Elise's *protegé*, and one of the few noblemen who visit the house of uncle, of the old 'champion of liberty,'" said she to Aunt Sophie, in an explanatory manner, turning from him.

The counsellor leaned his back against the windowsill.

"So it is a political liking, Margarete?" he remarked, mockingly. "Aunt Elise writes differently."

Her eyes sparkled with wounded maidenly pride; but she controlled herself. "This looks like the beginning of a family-gossip, and is Aunt Elise, the intellectual woman, to contribute her quota to it?" she said, with an incredulous shrug.

He laughed softly, but harshly. "Experience teaches that women as a class in the point of match-making—whether they be intelligent or ignorant—have one and all the same weaknesses."

"Oh, I pray you—I have not!" protested Aunt Sophie, energetically. "I have never burnt my fingers on such things."

"Do not boast too soon, Fraulein Sophie, you might just now be strongly tempted!" warned he, sarcastically. "Herr von Billinger is said to be a handsome man——"

"Yes, he is tall and has a face as white and pink as an apple-blossom!" interpolated Margarete.

He did not raise his eyes from his fingernails, which he seemed to be examining.

"Above all, he bears a name which is respected and very ancient," he continued.

"Yes, to be sure, very ancient!" agreed Margarete. "The books on heraldry disagree to this day as to which the strange image on one of the shields is, the flintstone-axe of a troglodyte or the fragment of a loom of the later palework period."

"Zounds, what a genealogy! Our sturdiest oaks would have to slink out of sight in the face of this," said Aunt Sophie, with a roguish twinkle of her eye. "What, do you aspire so high, Gretel?"

The young girl's eyes fairly sparkled with mischief. "Why should I not?" she returned. "Is not such

'aspiration a trait of our time? And I, a girl—a girl who has eight ounces less brain than the lords of creation—how could I form my own opinion and go my own way! No, I am not so daring! I walk bravely along the highway of the fashion of the day, and do not see why it should not afford me pleasure to become *greater*, and to shake from my feet the dust of my pedigree."

"Ah, our old gentlemen up there should hear that!" threatened Aunt Sophie, pointing to several of the oil-paintings as yet not taken down, representing the merchants looking out proudly and gravely from their wigs.

Margarete shrugged her shoulders with a smile. "Who knows how they would get along at the present day with their rigid burghers' ideas! 'We are the children of our time and not Spartans!' I heard someone say recently; and it may be that the old Lamprechts, working with the industry of bees in counting-house and warehouse, did like so many nowadays, and considered themselves fortunate to be able to pour their honey as their daughters' doweries into the empty hive of some 'old, respected family.' That is the burgher's pride nowadays—so people say."

"So people say," repeated the counsellor, with a nod of his head. "Of course you have this expression of sharp tongues from others only——"

"Of course," she agreed, laughing. "I do just like other young girls—I repeat, uncle. . . . I listen when others discuss the present state of affairs, and really many things interest me. For example, the climbing-pole, hung full of desirable things, which is now said to be set up in the world——"

"And to which the aspirants flock in crowds, is it not so, Margarete?" Herbert interrupted, with a cold smile.

Her eyes, which met his, darkened. "Surely, uncle!

Such people to whom the honorable home-soil is not good enough, the straight road not the best. Many a brave human being is trampled underfoot in the rush. Otherwise the climbing is not difficult, people say; one must always heed only outward signs, but never an inner voice, like that of the heart or of real conviction, otherwise one will fall like the somnambulist from the roof. Sometimes the lovely hands of women help——"

"Pst!" said Aunt Sophie, pointing her index finger in the direction of the stairs. She was no doubt pleased that footsteps were heard, and that they interrupted the conversation to which the young girl's angry allusions threatened to give a painful turn. "Run and take off the dress, Gretel," urged she. "Judging by the footstep, I think it is Reinhold who is coming up, and he can rarely understand a joke; he quickly becomes rude!"

Margarete flew towards the door. She wished to avoid coming into collision with her irritable brother; but it was too late, Reinhold was coming up the hall with his grandmother.

CHAPTER XII.

THOSE who entered started back before the "beautiful Dore," who had descended from her frame, while "Dore" retreated to the table in the middle of the drawing-room, her head bowed, as if awaiting the rudeness which must inevitably fall upon it.

"That is another of your wild pranks, Grete! You might frighten someone to death," said Herr Lamprecht junior promptly, as soon as he could breathe.

"Yes, Holdchen, it was very silly of me," she replied, with a smile, as she spoke going from door to door in order to close them—for a draught was hurtful to Reinhold.

"Nonsense!" he muttered, following her every movement with a vexed look. "That rustles and rattles, and the silver rubs off from the rotten threads. Papa ought to come in and see how you are dragging the costly heirloom over the floor! There would then be an end of his partiality, which must have developed over night; he acts just as if you had swallowed your wisdom by the spoonful in Berlin!"

"Do not excite yourself!" she implored. "I am going at once. In a few minutes the dress will be hanging in its place, and I shall never touch it again. Come, be good!" Imploringly she laid her dainty fingertips upon his hand, which rested on the table; but he pushed them away.

"Ah, cease this childishness, Grete! From a child I could never bear to have anyone come near me—you know that!"

She nodded her head with a smile, carefully gathered up the dress to prevent it from rustling as she went out, and

approached the middle door. But on the threshold she hesitated and turned around.

"What stupidity has occurred here?" she heard Reinhold say, and she saw him brush the pieces of the vase into a heap.

"Well, you see, Reinhold, it was a slight accident, such as easily happens when a thorough cleaning is going on," said Aunt Sophie, shrugging her shoulders. She purposely avoided mentioning the "poor wretch," the real delinquent.

"What, a slight accident?" repeated the young man, thoroughly roused. "Why, aunt, you do not seem to have the faintest idea of the valuables intrusted to your care up here! This vase cost ten ducats ; I will show it to you on the book—ten ducats! . . . Ah, God knows it is preposterous the way in which money is often squandered. My respected grandpapa was such an one, too. Thousands are invested in the stuff which he accumulated. The

dealers in curios know that, and frequently apply to us; but papa always grows angry, and I am made to suffer for days from his vexation at the unwarrantable extravagance! But all will some day be different, and I know one who will clear up. Then all will be turned into silver—everything that is not absolutely necessary for household use." He shook his head, and threw the pieces which he held in his hand upon the table. "Ten ducats! A trifle of course! A trifle to all in our house who cannot calculate."

"Well, only be calm; I know my multiplication table thoroughly, and do not need to sit upon your counting-house stools in order to know the value of money," Aunt Sophie interrupted, imperturbably. "But the ten ducats were at that time thrown away. Still the most sensible person can occasionally be misled by an imitation, such as this is." She pointed to the fragments.

"How—imitation? Who says so?"

"Margarete says so," said the counsellor, who had advanced slowly to the table.

Reinhold laughed boisterously. "Grete? This one?" He pointed to the young girl with his finger.

"Yes, your sister," replied Herbert, glancing fixedly at his nephew's impertinent, grinning face. "Moreover, I should like to ask you to change the tone of rudeness which you employ towards aunt and your sister. On account of your nervousness a great deal has been excused in you—too much, I fear—but now you should realize that you, too, have duties."

At first Reinhold had stared nonplused at the speaker, such a grave rebuke from those lips was new to him; but with all his audacity he was nevertheless a cowardly fellow, who avoided anyone stronger than himself. He bit his lower lip, and did not venture a word of reply. Averting his face shyly, he put his hand in his breast-pocket, drew

out a letter and threw it upon the table so that the very large seal lay uppermost. "Here, Grete, the letter was left at the counting-house for you," said he, crustily. "Only for the sake of the coat-of-arms, which is almost as large as our ducal one, did I climb the draughty stairs; otherwise it is a matter of indifference to me who writes to you."

The girl blushed deeply. The pertness which just now had animated her vanished. Almost helplessly, with a timid, anxious glance at the letter, she stood there like a terrified child.

"That is Herr von Billingen-Wackewitz's crest, Reinhold," said Frau Amtsratin, quite solemnly and with evident astonishment. "I could show you many a sacredly prized *billet-doux* with this fine seal. A Fraulein von Billingen was formerly governess in the ducal family. She was very affable to me, and corresponded with me relative to our club. My God, if at that time I had thought——" She ceased with an almost enraptured glance, twined her arm around her granddaughter's waist, and drew her to her. "My dear, dear Gretchen, you little rogue!" she cried, with exceeding tenderness. "So *that* was the magnet which kept you in Berlin? . . . And I was so short-sighted as to reproach you, while you were ordained to bring unspeakable happiness to our house. What a blind, unjust grandmama, eh, my darling child? Are you vexed with me?"

The granddaughter freed herself from the embrace, and drew back a step; she had regained her composure. "I have no occasion to be vexed—such a feeling would not be proper for a grandchild," said she almost dryly, arranging, with a sidelong glance at Reinhold, the lace on the costly heirloom. "We dare not allow ourselves such extravagances as long as I am in beautiful Dore's fine gown—Reinhold will scold."

"Ah, did *he* but know what I know," replied the old lady, with a sly wink of her eye, "he would agree with me that the gown suits you admirably! Ah, as I see you there before me with your aristocratic bearing, and—well, a grandmother may be weak for once in her grandmother's pride—and your bright, piquant little face—ah, you might cheerfully join the illustrious forms which look down from the walls in a certain hall!"

"What, with the 'wild hair and the hoydenish manners,' grandmama?"

Frau Amtsratin colored slightly, and raised both hands. "Dear child—but no," she interrupted herself, "I will be still today! Tomorrow, or perhaps in the course of a few days, you will have a great deal to tell me, a great deal, my child, which will make me happy forever. I know it. Until then I will be contented!"

Margarete did not answer. Shyly she picked up the letter, slipped it into her capacious pocket, and left the room in order to return the state-gown to its place. At this moment Frau Amtsratin, too, remembered that she had come downstairs to ask a recipe from Aunt Sophie; but the counsellor, who had only come in because in passing he had heard the noise of the falling vase, had taken hat and cane from the table, and had in the meantime gone out into the hall.

He was standing at the nearest *buffet*, apparently examining with great interest the old bowls and cups, when Margarete passed him on her way to the corridor. "You will have much to apologize to me for later on, Margarete," said he, half-aloud, but with emphasis, speaking to her over his shoulder.

"I, uncle?" She slackened her pace, and, smiling slyly, drew nearer him. "My God, it shall be done immediately, at once, if you wish it! Daughters and

nieces must do that, and can do it, too, without detracting from their maidenly dignity."

He turned towards her; but, too, at the same time he cast upon Reinhold, who was advancing, so severe and lowering a glance that the tall fellow in surprise turned and left the hall with both old ladies.

"You seem to reckon the years during which we have not met double as regards my person," said Herbert, moodily. "I seem very venerable to you, do I not, Margarete?"

She turned her face a little to one side, and her merry eyes scanned his features scrutinizingly. "Well, do you know, it is not so bad—I do not see one single gray hair in your lovely beard."

"It is bad enough that you are already seeking them!" For a moment he looked through the nearest window. "I was somewhat surprised to be greeted so respectfully by you on your arrival; as far as I can recollect Reinhold alone called me 'uncle,' you never did!"

"You are right—I never did, in spite of many a lecture! Your uncle's face did not impress me! 'It is just like milk and blood,' Barbe always said."

"Is that so? Well, is the coloring aged enough for you now?"

She laughed. "Ah, that has nothing to do with it any more—it is the beard! Such an aristocratic, parted beard is imposing, uncle!"

He bowed ironically.

"And then—when I saw you the night before last seated next the lovely lady, when you came out into the hall, every inch the highest official of the town, and your whole person was glorified by the reflection of princely distinction, the feeling of respect overwhelmed me, and I was dreadfully ashamed of myself."

"Then I should be highly delighted that the title of uncle comes so glibly from your lips?"

With a smile she nodded her head. "Well, you know it is not so very pleasant. I can see that to be called 'uncle' by a girl as old as I am cannot be so. But I cannot help you. We poor Lamprecht children anyhow have come too short; we have only this one brother of our mother's, and although but a step-uncle, you must nevertheless put up with being called 'Uncle Herbert' all your life."

"Well and good, I am satisfied, dear niece. But let me tell you that you take upon yourself in regard to this acknowledged relationship the duty of obedience."

She started; but almost immediately a ray of enlightenment passed over her face. "Ah, you mean this!" With a deep blush she laid her hand upon the pocket in which the letter just received lay, and her eyes gleamed hostily.

He cast a sidelong glance at her, and made no reply.

"Yes, that is it!" she said, with decision. "You think just like grandmama. You are proud of the prospect offered me, and open heart and arms to the suitor without ever having seen him. For what should you see him?

You know his name—more is not necessary. But, too, you are aware of your niece's queer head, and perhaps you are possessed by the secret fear that she might be guilty of the rash act of preferring to remain Grete Lamprecht; so one more right to opposition is of great value to the family. The house of Marschall is on the point of soaring above the clouds, so personal interest demands that the Lamprechts as its relatives should be raised higher."

"It is astonishing how acute you are!"

She laughed. "No, uncle, I must not accept the compliment! You have too flattering an opinion of me. That"—she lifted the little finger of her right hand—"that does not tell me. . . . The whole atmosphere of our house is animated and enlivened, from all the corridors and stair-corners it is whispered to me, for I was born on an Easter Sunday and have always been in favor with our household sprites. And, as formerly, they whispered to me of olden times, of the silver threads of the lint which was turned in the world without into a source of commerce which flowed back as pure gold into my ancestors' coffers, so now do they whisper to me of quite a different splendor, of princely grace and favor, of the favor of handsome, blue-blooded women, and of the old plebeian blood which after hundreds of years of industrious collecting is now ready to flow into a higher channel."

"Ah, those are charming brownies with their petty malice which poison the air! They should be hunted up——"

"With your gendarmes, uncle? That would be a joke for the merry fellows! They would then indeed take up their station at my ear and tell me of the new play in the Lamprecht household, a play in which that stupid thing, Grete, is to participate—a baron's coronet perched upon the curly pate, and the transformation would be complete,

they say. . . . But you know, uncle, I too have a little something to say about it ; do you not think so? The tiny word 'yes' has to be said, too. And you must watch out that the bird does not fly away before he has sung! You will not catch *me?*"

"A trial will show——"

"Try it, uncle!" She half-turned and looked over her shoulder at him, and her eyes sparkled as if she was ready to enter into the race with the spirits.

"I accept the challenge, depend upon it! But bear this in mind, if I once have the bird, that is the end of him!"

"Ah, poor thing, he will have to sing as you whistle!" she laughed. "But I have no fear—I am a mocking-bird, uncle, and could easily lead you into the wrong path."

She bowed gracefully, laughing to herself, and hurriedly walked towards the passage in the rear of Frau Dorothea's death chamber, and as with nimble fingers she loosened the straps of the gown, she heard the counsellor leave the hall. At the same moment the voice of her father, who was ascending the stairs, was audible. The two gentlemen met, it seemed, in the doorway ; then the door closed and her father went to his room.

He had ridden to Dambach early in the morning, had remained to dinner, and just now returned. She longed to greet him, so much the more so as that morning he had sat in the saddle moodily silent, with a clouded brow, and in reply to her gay "good-morning," spoken from the window, she had received but a slight nod and not a word of reply. That made her youthful, light heart heavy. But Aunt Sophie comforted her. This was one of those days when one must be silent and avoid him, she said. He knew the best what was needed to free him from the gloomy phantom—it was a ride in the fresh air and

diversion in the factory. In the evening he would return more "companionable."

Beautiful Dore's brocaded train again hung in the deepest recess of the press, and Margarete was about to arrange her hair, when she again heard her father's door open. He came out and went down the hall. He walked rapidly, and it seemed as if he were going directly towards the corridor.

Margarete was startled. She was not dressed, and moreover she did not want to be seen here by him; she did not yet know in what mood he had returned home, and how he would view her audacious outrage upon the revered family heirloom. She was possessed by a genuine sensation of fear. Involuntarily she slipped into the press, hiding herself in the voluminous silken billows—it seemed to her as if she were sinking in murmuring waters—and drew the door softly to.

A few moments later the counsellor of administration turned the corner of the corridor. Through the crack of the door his daughter could see him. The ride in the fresh air and the bustle of the factory at Dambach had had no effect upon the morbid melancholy which frequently rendered this handsome man so terror-inspiring to the family. He held a tiny bunch of fresh roses in his right hand, and heedlessly walked between the rows of his ancestors' portraits. But beautiful Frau Dore's oil-painting, leaning obliquely between the wall and the corner of the press, and displaying to his view the bewitching form, seemed to exercise a strange influence over him. He drew back and put his hand to his eyes as if he were dizzy. This fear was comprehensible. Over there in the red *salon*, high up on the bright wall, the demoniacal trait of this beauty was never as prominent as it was here in the ghostly semi-darkness. . . . He muttered passionate words

under his breath, seized, as in a passion, the heavy portrait and turned it towards the wall. The frame struck against the stone wall and cracked in the sutures.

The terrified daughter's breath came in gasps. It seemed as if suddenly the flame of madness had burst forth from amid the dark, melancholy brooding, as if the violent hand would in its frenzy turn the peaceful house into a scene of horror. But it was not so. With the disappearance in the dark corner of the woman's form, the storm in the soul of the agitated man seemed allayed. He passed on, close by his daughter, so close that she thought she could feel his hot breath through the crevice of the door.

Soon after the key turned in the lock of the nearest door. Herr Lamprecht entered, drew out the key again and fastened the bolt within.

The listener shuddered. What was he doing in there, so alone with his gloomy thoughts, in the desolate, dusty rooms? No one in the house suspected that he went there. Barbe maintained that he never set foot any more in the corridor—he must have been very much frightened at some time, for no brave man would avoid the place for nothing. Yet, now he was within—as though buried in the deep silence and shadow; not a sound came from in there. But perhaps it was this solitude which he sought when he could not shake off his evil demons amid the bustle of the world. It probably quieted the inward storm, the heated, diseased blood which clouded his brain. . . . Yes, he was ill. It was not, as grandmama had falsely maintained, grief alone for her dead mother which altered him so terribly—he was not so embittered and umbrageous during the first years after her death—no, he was ill, phantoms persecuted and tortured him; she was forced to acknowledge it on the night of her arrival.

He, the upright, honorable head of the respected firm

of Lamprecht, the proud man upon whose honor not the slightest blemish rested, suddenly fancied that the time might come when people would point their fingers at him, when he would be exiled from the circles towards which his false ambition ceaselessly strove. Her heart contracted with pain as she recalled the fact of how at that moment he had stood almost beseechingly before her, his child, and had appealed to her filial faith, her aid. So far had illness brought him!

For another moment she turned towards the bolted door in a listening attitude—all was still within—then with trembling limbs she stepped from her place of concealment, gathered together her clothes, and flew to one of the front rooms in order there to dress as hastily as possible. . . . How fortunate that papa had not returned home ten minutes earlier! Did the painted, inanimate canvas excite him to such a degree, what would have happened if he had seen the unfortunate woman suddenly before him apparently in the flesh! That the mummery had already worked another misfortune her soul did not think.

For half an hour the terrified man-servant sat below upon the kitchen-bench. His trembling limbs refused to carry him, and his usually red cheeks were pale. The entire kitchen smelled of liquor—"nothing better than that!" Barbe had said, pushing one saturated lump of sugar after the other into his mouth. The whole staff of servants stood around him, and could not hear and "tremble" enough.

"No, no, no—once for all, no!" he repeated decidedly for the hundredth time. "I shall not touch them again—not for the world! Let her find some way to get up again on her hook. . . . *I* break anything! Good Lord, I have had my pipe-bowl going on fourteen years, and I defy

anyone to find even a scratch on it! And show me the plate or the glass I have broken here in the kitchen when drying them, Barbe! You can't do it, not if you want to—I never do such things! . . . And up there that thing, that vase, flew right out of my hands! A sly push of my elbow from behind, and—crash, there lay the pieces on the floor! That was my punishment for taking the spiteful thing from her place! . . . I thought it would be so, and did not want to do it. 'The room will not be prepared, Fraulein,' said I. The picture might just as well have hung there. But Fraulein Sophie believes in

nothing—the picture had to come down, it had to, and I, poor wretch, had to bear the consequences. Ah, I shall never get over the fright in all my life! And, too, when she came upon me afterwards, as if stepping out of the frame, her green dress rustling and the rubies glowing on her head like sparks of the infernal fire, I thought, now you are done for! I cleared the door and it closed behind me; but on the stairs she clutched my throat with her icy fingers."

"Nonsense, Friedrich! She did nothing to you on the stairs—she cannot cross the threshold!" said Barbe, handing him a *liqueur* glass. "Now take this swallow of peppermint dram; it will set you on your feet! . . . And, folks, let me tell you—keep the story to yourselves! The family will not believe it, they would not were we to bring proof of it in black and white. First they laugh and then they scold, and then one is vexed by having fun made of one's remarks. And we cannot open our mouths to the people in the town—certainly not! They bear us Lamprechts a grudge; our enormous business, our position and immense wealth—all this does not please the envious, to whom a misfortune to our family would be a delight—and a misfortune there will be, that is sure. At the time that our Gretchen almost died, she flitted around up there until she sent the child home to us half-dead. . . . So we must prick up our ears and keep watch. I tell you to be careful with fire and light—that is our affair. Whatsoever may happen besides, we cannot help. . . . It makes my flesh creep——" In proof of her words she pushed back her sleeve. "It may come any moment—any moment!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AND during the night which followed it did seem as if a wailing voice repeated this prophecy across the market-place and the whole town—the first October storm broke over the land. The crows had circled over the town all the afternoon in large flocks, and in the evening the sun set as in a sea of blood; the reflection had lain for a long time upon the tip of the tower and the church-roofs.

And now it came. All through the night the wind howled, and when day broke the storm-melody still whistled through the streets. The people who crossed the market-place could scarcely stand on their feet, and hats and caps flew around the street-corners.

Frau Amtsratin was vexed. The dainty feet were somewhat uncertain and wavering. She dared not venture on the street when the wind blew so furiously, and so the visits for that day planned to be made with her granddaughter in the town had to be postponed.

Margarete, on the other hand, was delighted. The afternoon of freedom seemed made especially for her. She sat upstairs in her grandmama's sitting-room, and with nimble fingers helped the old lady with her large fine piece of embroidery. The rug was to be put on Herbert's Christmas table, had been told her in a mysterious whisper,

but it was in reality intended to lie before the lady's writing-desk in the future home of the young couple. And Margarete indefatigably embroidered the bunches of blossoms upon which beautiful Heloise's feet were to tread.

At four o'clock Herbert returned home from the office. His study was in the next room. For quite a time the coming and going of people could be heard—beadles brought packages of documents; a gendarme made an announcement; beseeching voices, too, were heard, and Margarete could not help thinking how utterly the deep silence in the upper part of the old merchants' home had been exorcised by occupants who did not bear the name of Lamprecht. The old merchants had never dreamed of such a thing! It had always been their pride to occupy the large house alone, and to have the upper floor empty rather than that the feet of strangers should have the right to pass up and down their fine broad staircase, and make a profane noise.

Notwithstanding the storm—yes, just at a moment when the windows were rattling from the most violent gusts of wind, a charmingly arranged basket of luscious fruit was brought from Prince's Court. Frau Amtsratin's hands trembled with delight at the attention. She hurriedly spread a cloth over the Christmas rug, and called in her son, after having dismissed the servant with a liberal *pourboire*.

The counsellor for a moment paused upon the threshold as though surprised to find anyone besides his mother in the room; then he advanced, bowing in the direction of the window at which Margarete was seated.

"Good day, uncle!" she said, returning his greeting with imperturbability, continuing to work on the end of the rug which peeped from under the cover.

He knit his brows slightly, and cast an absent glance at the basket of fruit which his mother held towards him. "What a strange idea to send a servant to town in such weather!" said he. "There would surely have been time——"

"No, Herbert!" interrupted Frau Amtsratin. "The fruit is freshly picked, and should not lose its flavor. And then—you know that they do not allow many days to pass without showing some signs of friendship. . . . What a delicious fragrance! I shall arrange a plateful of pears and grapes for you immediately, and put them in your room——"

"Many thanks, dear mother! Enjoy this fruit yourself. I make no claim upon it—the attention is paid solely to you."

With these words he returned to his study.

"He is hurt because the token of love was not sent direct to him!" whispered the Frau Amtsratin, in her granddaughter's ear, while she put on her spectacles and resumed her work. "My God, Heloise dare not act thus yet! He is so timidly reserved, so incomprehensibly little self-conscious, and almost seems to hope that she will bring about the decisive word. Withal, he is exceedingly jealous, even of me, of his unselfish mother, as you have just seen. . . . Yes, child, you will now find out!" she added, aloud, in a bantering tone, resuming the subject, but just now interrupted by the entrance of the servant.

She sought to convert the window-recess into a confessional—she was questioning her about Herr von Billingen-Wackewitz's letter. Margarete had burnt the writing the night before, and her refusal was already on the way, but of that she allowed not a word to escape her. She replied diplomatically in monosyllables, and was vexed at heart that the old lady should several times mention the name

of the rejected suitor in as loud and nonchalant a tone as if he already belonged to the family. It vexed her still more because the door of the adjoining room was not tightly closed ; the crevice grew visibly larger, and whosoever was passing out and in could hear all of these indiscreet remarks.

The door, to be sure, was behind her grandmother, who did not know it was open, until a sound in the next room attracted her attention, and she turned in surprise. "Do you want anything, Herbert?" she called.

"No, mother! Let me leave the door open a little ; my room has been overheated!"

Frau Amtsratin laughed softly to herself, and shook her head. "He thinks we are talking about Heloise, and of course that is music to his ears," she whispered to her granddaughter, beginning at once to talk about Prince's Court and its occupants.

It was not long before it began to grow dark. Work was rolled up and laid away, and this ended her grandmother's extravagant descriptions. Margarete heaved a sigh of relief, and hastily withdrew. She did not even have to bid good-bye to Herbert, for the door had long since been softly closed from within.

On the stairs there was a draught. No wonder! In the *bel-étage* one side of the large window looking on the court-yard was open, and the storm, which came from the north across the warehouse roof, blew directly in, and tones like those of an organ entered with it.

As she descended Margarete saw her father standing at the window. The wind beat upon his breast and played among the curly locks upon his brow.

"Will you get down?" he called angrily out into the roaring storm, waving his hand in the direction of the warehouse.

His daughter stepped to his side. He started, and hastily turned towards her his agitated face.

"That madcap over there probably wants to break his neck!" said he with an effort, pointing to the open gallery of the warehouse.

There stood little Max upon the ledge of the gallery. He had his left arm around one of the wooden posts, which supported the projecting roof; the other was extended declamatorily into the roaring elements, and he was singing; but it was no connected melody—he struck only the single notes of the scale, and allowed the tones to swell and ring out, as if he wanted to measure the strength of his small lungs with that of the storm. Those were the supposed organ-tones. He probably had not heard the words called to him, for he began anew.

"He will not fall, papa!" said Margarete, laughing. "I know best what one can venture upon at this age. The columns on our upper story could tell quite a different tale of my tightrope-dancing powers. The storm

cannot harm him, it is at his back. To be sure, the old woodwork over there is not to be trusted." She drew forth her pocket-hankerchief, and waved it out of the window.

The boy saw the signal at once. He ceased his singing and leaped from his high post. Evidently frightened and confused, he busied himself with some work on the gallery; he was probably ashamed to think he had been observed.

"The little fellow has gold in his throat," said Margarete. "But he is a tiny prodigal. When he is twenty he will not sing so thoughtlessly in a storm, for he will know how to prize the valuable material. . . . You will not have *him* in your counting-house, papa—he will some day be a great singer."

"Do you think so?" His eyes sparkled strangely, almost hostily. "I do not believe that he was born to amuse others."

He reached out to close the window; but at that instant a howling gust of wind tore the casement out of his hand—a gust of much greater violence than any which during the night had made the walls of the house tremble. What happened next neither of those at the window saw —they thought the storm was about to sweep at one blow from the earth the old house and all who lived and breathed within it—a terrible crash, the sound of falling timbers, then a momentary lull, as if the tyrant himself was startled at the destruction worked, and scarcely ventured to touch the impenetrable, grayish-yellow cloud which suddenly filled the courtyard.

The warehouse! Yes, from that direction came the clouds of dust!

With one wild bound Herr Lamprecht passed his daughter and descended the stairs. Margarete flew after

He RUSHED AWAY, AND SHE CLUNG TO THE NEAREST TREE-TRUNK IN ORDER THAT SHE MIGHT REMAIN UPON HER FEET. (P. 179.)

him ; but only on reaching the courtyard did she succeed in grasping his arm—mute with horror, she could not ask him to take her with him.

"Stay there!" he commanded, shaking her off. "Do you want to be killed, too?" Those were tones which penetrated to her very bones, and she fancied she could see his hair stand on end.

He rushed away, and she clung to the nearest tree-trunk in order that she might remain upon her feet, for at this moment a gust of wind blew the struggling clouds suffocatingly towards the house, and then scattered them to the darkening sky.

Again, too, clear outlines were visible from amid the indistinct mass. The warehouse was still standing, but as a scarcely recognizable ruin. The lower half of the heavy tiled roof, which had projected far beyond the open gallery, protecting and darkening it, had fallen, and had dragged with it the supporting posts and the balustrades. Below the ruins were piled up above the windows of the second floor, and loosened rafters and tiles were still falling. The way to the heap of ruins was a very dangerous one—Margarete uneasily watched her father climb over the chaos, here pushing aside obstructing beams, there sinking above his knees amid rafters and pieces of tile, but in a few seconds he had forced his way through and disappeared in the shadow of the doorway.

Various exclamations from the windows of the main-house had accompanied his efforts, and now all the occupants of the house rushed out into the court—Aunt Sophie, the whole staff of servants, and almost at the same time the clerks in the office. The storm blew them to the spot where Margarete was standing under the elms, to the firm walls of the weaving-house.

Well, nothing could now happen to the master! The

strong arched doorway there, through which he had passed, could not be overturned by the fiercest storm ; but the child, the poor little boy had been buried beneath the horrible load! Barbe had just seen him from the kitchen-window standing on the gallery.

The old cook's face was pale with horror, as pale as that of a ghost ; but as she ran and struggled against the storm, she said, with trembling lips : "Well, folks—there it is! Was old Barbe right or not?" Her voice was scarcely to be understood, so stifled was it with dust, the storm and fear ; but it had to be spoken.

Aunt Sophie tied her handkerchief about her flying hair and gathered up her skirts. She could not utter any words, but her hands and feet were ready to act. Notwithstanding the falling tiles and pieces of wood and the storm raging so furiously around her, she hastened across the courtyard to the pile of ruins beneath which the poor, dead child was supposed to be lying, and the others followed her without delay. But almost simultaneously the counsellor appeared at the open kitchen-door which led out upon the gallery. He waved his hand as if to ward them off. "Back! No one is hurt!" he called down.

Now thank God! The faces cleared. Let what would fall from the tottering roof, it hurt no one, and the damage already done could be repaired by carpenter and tinner. They could retire comforted to the protecting hall.

"Well, well—it came within a hair's-breadth of happening!" said Barbe, in a tone of resignation, rubbing the dust from her face with her apron. "It is incomprehensible to me that the boy escaped—simply incomprehensible! At the very last moment he was standing at the balustrade." She shook her head incredulously. "Well, it might have been so, and it is lucky, very lucky, that the worst did not come to pass! It would have been terrible, too, for our

house, and none of us could ever have been happy again——"

"Don't be so silly, Barbe!" cried Reinhold. He had remained behind in the hall, because in the storm he rightfully feared his most dangerous enemy. "You really act as if one of our family had been in danger, and that the Lamprechts would have had to wear mourning if an accident had happened to the decorator's boy. Idle chatter! But you are all so! Only what concerns yourselves can worry you; the damage which your employers have to sustain by the stupid affair is to you a trifle! You think we have money by bushels, and so it can be squandered—I know you!"

He raised his hand with its long, thin fingers and shook it at the servants, then with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders he turned from the startled people.

"The affair over there will cost us a pretty sum," said he, to the men from the counting-house, nodding in the direction of the warehouse. "It is unwarrantable in papa that he allowed the building to go to ruin. Such a thing will quite surely not happen to me later on; not a misplaced tile will escape me—upon that you can depend—and should I have to creep upon all fours into the corners to look after it! Yes, and——" He ceased abruptly, thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and, stretching out his long legs, he leaned his back against the wind-protected wall; the counsellor was just crossing the court.

He still looked very much excited, and his storm-tossed hair, which fell wildly over his forehead, increased the impression. But upon seeing the crowd of people gathered in the hall, he evidently braced up and drew his form to its full height. His eyes coldly met the anxious glances of the people; it seemed as if he wanted to avoid all questioning—conversation with his inferiors was not his business.

He beckoned to the man-servant, gave him a medicine vial which he held in his clinched fist, and sent him to the druggist's. "The fright has given the old lady a shock; she is very ill, and there was not a drop of remedy in the vial," said he, curtly, almost harshly, and yet apologetically, to Aunt Sophie; a slight flush upon his brow—it was but a trifle, Samaritan service, common humanity towards a suffering fellow-mortal, but on the part of the unapproachable, haughty man it was and remained an incomprehensible condescension, and, as it seemed, chiefly in his own eyes.

Margarete at this moment did as Aunt Sophie had done before—with dexterous hands she bound a shawl over her head and went silently toward the courtyard door.

"Where are you going, Gretchen?" asked the counsellor, seizing her arm.

She tried to go on. "I want to see to the sick woman, of course—— "

"You will not do so, my child," said he, drawing her closer to him. "There is certainly no 'of course' in the matter, that for the sake of a convulsion you should run into danger to be severely hurt yourself. . . . Frau Lenz suffers frequently from such attacks, and it has never yet occurred to anyone in the main-house to help her. Such going back and forth has never been the custom with us, and I do not want any change made!"

At these decisively uttered words Margarete silently untied the knot under her chin. The servants vanished noiselessly behind different doors, and the clerks hurriedly withdrew to the counting-house. Reinhold alone remained behind?

"That serves you right, Grete!" said he, maliciously. "Yes, it is now the style for young girls to don blue aprons and to go to the houses of the poor to nurse sick people and to bathe dirty children; and of course you, too, think how wonderfully beautiful Grete Lamprecht would look as a Sister Elizabeth! It is fortunate that papa will not allow such nonsense! And tomorrow the occasion for such absurd doings will cease of itself, eh, papa? The people cannot possibly remain in the warehouse if building is going on? They will surely have to leave?"

"That is not necessary—the people will stay where they are!" replied the counsellor, curtly; whereupon Reinhold, thrusting his hands more deeply into his trousers pockets and raising his high shoulders still higher, turned in silent anger and went back to the office.

The counsellor put his arm around his daughter and led

her to the sitting-room. He called for wine, and the first glasses of the heavy Burgundy were swallowed hastily, as if it required all the strength of the wine to do away with an inward stagnation.

Margarete seated herself upon the half-pace where as a child she had always sat at Aunt Sophie's feet. She crossed her arms upon her knees and leaned her head on the upholstered seat of the arm-chair—she was alone with papa. Within these four walls it was cozy and comfortable; the flowering plants on the casement filled the pure, warm air of the room with fragrance; the clock had not been affected by the confusion in the house, it ticked on as usual, and the footsteps of the man pacing to and fro, engrossed with his own thoughts, kept perfect time with the swinging pendulum. But out of doors it was blowing fiercely; the windows rattled, and occasionally across the market-place came the sound of slamming doors and window-blinds.

"This will surely shake the entire roof off the warehouse," said Margarete, raising her head.

"Yes, a great many tiles will fall off yet, but not the superstructure," replied the counsellor. "I was up in the garret. The old timbers are like iron, strong and well-put together. That which lies in ruins in the courtyard is a miserable piece of patchwork of recent date."

For a moment he paused, facing her, and the waning daylight fell upon his features. The wine had done its work; it made the blood course rapidly through his veins, and drove the pallor caused by fright from brow and cheeks.

"And is little Max really unhurt?" asked his daughter.

"Yes, the loosened piece of roofing flew over and past him."

"A veritable miracle! One might almost believe that

two hands were extended protectingly over the little curly pate—his dead mother's hands."

The counsellor did not reply. He turned and filled his glass with wine.

"I cannot shake off the terrible thought—my hands and feet are still trembling," she added, after a moment's pause. "To think that this lovely boy, so full of life and spirit, might have lain dead or horribly mangled beneath the timbers and *débris*——" She ceased and covered her eyes with her hand.

Silence for an instant reigned in the room, a silence so deep that the murmur of agitated voices from the kitchen could be heard.

"Our servants cannot calm down either, it seems," said Margarete. "They are fond of the child. The poor little rogue! He has a dreary childhood. The country is strange to him, his mother is dead, and the father, whom he has never seen, is far across the sea——"

"The child needs no pity, he is worshiped by his relatives," interrupted the counsellor. His face was still averted, he held the wine-glass to the light and examined the dark, glowing contents; therefore, his voice sounded rather indistinct.

"By his father as well?" asked the young girl, bitterly and doubtfully. She shook her head. "He seems to pay little heed to the child. Why does he not have him with him, where he belongs by rights?"

The filled glass was placed upon the table untouched, and a faint smile played about the lips of the man who drew nearer. "Then the father who allowed his daughter to remain away from him for five years is to be severely judged, too?" he asked, still smiling, but with that nervous tremor of the underlip which in him was invariably the sign of inward agitation.

She sprang up and clung to him. "Ah, that was quite different!" she protested, eagerly. "Your romp was accessible to you at any time, and how often you visited her and looked after her! You have but to express the wish, and I will remain with you now and forever. But little Lenz's father——"

"Forever?" repeated the counsellor. He ignored her last words, and spoke in a loud and hurried tone: "Forever? Child, how long will it be before a whirlwind will come from Mecklinburg and waft my little snowflake here away—forever, too!"

She drew back and her face darkened. "Ah, you know that likewise? Those kind people are in a great hurry!"

"Whom do you mean by that?"

"Well whom should I mean but grandmama and Uncle Herbert, the severe counsellor!" With comical indignation she passed her hand through her curls and brushed them from her brow. "Horrible! Now they have chattered to you, and it is scarcely four-and-twenty hours since Aunt Elise's glorious news reached their ears! . . . Well, I am to be married in a hurry! Just now they need a 'ladyship' in the family, another's illustrious name, some sort of a cloud of incense which would hide our simple house and pleasantly mount to the nostrils of those in an exalted position, and for this the poor victim, Gretel, is to be sacrificed. . . . But it does not go so quickly!" She smiled maliciously. "First of all they must have the girl if they want to tie her. Uncle Herbert——"

"What a peculiar notion that is of yours with regard to your uncle!" he interrupted. "He does not need us Lamprechts; it will be a matter of indifference to him what name you bear in the future. He wants everything through himself. How many have been shipwrecked by this challenging principle—in our time when all efforts should come

forth with a great will-power, it is disagreeable, almost prohibited! But he dares do it. He is a Sunday-child, to whom all hands are extended unasked, though he rejects them rudely. I believe, even with regard to his marriage, he is considering whether handsome Heloise is not bringing him more than he is giving—therefore, his hesitation."

"Impossible!" She shook her head incredulously and astonished, clasped her hands and laughed. "That is just the very reverse of what the world says of him——"

"The world! I should like to see the man who could boast of knowing what *he* thinks! . . . Yes, in social intercourse he has courteous, debonair ways; but this seeming pliableness is merely superficial, I know that much! He is thoroughly firm and conscious of his aim. I envy him his coolness of judgment, ah, and how!" He heaved a deep sigh, drank at one draught the glass of Burgundy, and then said: "These qualities of character support him, and have always helped him to reach the stars——"

"No, papa—not always!" she interrupted, laughing. "There was a time, too, when he descended from his lofty pinnacle and reached for the flowers of the earth! Do you remember pretty Blanka Lenz, with her long, fair braids?" She ceased in the face of the hideous, mocking laugh which suddenly escaped her father. Again he paced to and fro so violently that the old boards creaked beneath his feet.

It was some time before he paused in front of her, and then she was startled—his face was a brownish-red, his eyes looked as wild as they had the day previous when he turned lovely Dore's picture towards the wall.

"Descended? Yes, descended—did you not say so?" He pointed his index-finger at her in proof thereof. "Do you not see that your leveling principle is far-fetched? What can such a little girl know!" he said, shrugging his shoulders and running his hand impatiently through his

hair. "So my Grete is to become a Baroness Billingen!" he added after a pause, with an effort. "It would suit me! I should be proud! I could approach all the old gentlemen in the rooms upstairs, and say: 'See here, it is *my* daughter who has brought the seven-pointed coronet into our family——'" He ceased and clinched his teeth, and Margarete, who at first had started up insulted, suddenly hung upon his arm and looked into his face with a smile.

"Well, then take your baroness-daughter, you proud papa, and lead her! But quite slowly, not so quickly as you have just been walking!" said she, passing her soft hand over his darkly-flushed brow. "You are too red there—I do not like it! So—one, two—one, two—nicely in step! And if you think it is *my* opinion when I speak in the sense of uncle, you are somewhat mistaken. . . . A man, who finally woos at the princely court has 'descended' by his first love for a poor decorator's daughter—so judges the so-called world, and he himself from his present standpoint. But you must not thus mock at your little girl and her principles, naughty papa—the reproaches for inconsistency hurt me! To *me* Blanka Lenz would not have lost in comparison with the Pomeranian beauty at Prince's Court were she ever so

pink and white and voluptuous! The decorator's lovely daughter was to me the ideal of my enthusiastic, childish soul! My heart always palpitated when she stepped upon the gallery, so fresh and graceful, as indescribably charming as a fairy! I would gladly have called her 'aunt'—with the ducal niece I shall of course be satisfied with a low courtesy and the inquiry after her Grace's health!"

She spoke with that mixture of jest and earnestness which characterized her whole manner, and her father walked beside her at the slow pace she had set. His head was bowed upon his breast as though he were engrossed with his own thoughts, and as though he scarcely heard her chatter, but his heart throbbed wildly against her arm—he was not calm.

"And now, to be serious—there is nothing in that story of the baroness-daughter, papa, really not—it would be too dear a joke!" she continued, in the same tone. "What should I do with a mere name if in return for it I have to give my whole life? A poor exchange! . . . The nôble scion of the house of Billingen may like me—I think so only because for the moment he lost his head so totally that he wooed me—but a horrible sense of regret would not fail to be his, that I know! The tall, stout Goliath is a coxcomb who is tied to his mother's apron-strings, and this mother towers up just as tall and robust as her son—and now just fancy your thin, little Grete between them, just fancy how her terrible, proud, old mother-in-law will pluck one feather after the other out of her wings that she can never return to her native nest, and that the aristocratic world may not tell the cuckoo by its feathers! . . . And should the old gentlemen upstairs take pleasure in the blush of shame on the cheeks of my mother-in-law? But do not think so! They would be as grateful for the seven-pointed coronet as I am!"

She stopped, barred his way and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"Eh, papa," she implored, with emotion, "you will not torment me like the others do? You will let your 'snowflake' whirl as she likes? I am old enough to find my way myself!"

He stroked her curly head, which rested upon his breast.

"No, I shall not force you, Gretchen!" he replied, with a gentleness which touched her. "Years ago I would have called into play all my authority in order to induce you; but today I do not want to lose you—for lost you would be to me in the family, as you describe it, doubly lost as affairs now are. . . . The storm without shakes my soul like the voice of a fanatical preacher, and I am weary. I shall need my little comrade, with her bright eyes, her honest sense of justice—probably very soon, Grete——"

"Agreed!" she exclaimed, shaking his hand strongly and heartily indeed, like a companion in arms. "Now I am satisfied, papa! Just now when so many of our rank cringe and stoop, and, to their own detriment, help to support anew the old and mouldering, an energetic sign of life is necessary for the citizens' pride, and be it but that of a—girl. . . . Now I will go and fetch you a glass of fresh water—your face is growing hotter and hotter!"

He detained her with the remark that he had in his room a remedy for the attacks of dizziness which again came upon him daily. With feverish lips he kissed her brow and went out.

"That comes and goes like a thief in the night! Do not worry, Gretel!" said Aunt Sophie, who had just entered

with an armful of dishes in order to set the supper-table. She took up the wine-glass and held it to the light. "Drained to the dregs!" she scolded, angrily. "You need not be surprised if your face is red. The doctor talks year in year out against strong wines; but when a fright or a care is to be exorcised, the strongest must be always used! Men will never learn sense!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE shades were lowered in the sitting-room. One could not view the market-place, where the unfortunate human beings who were obliged to be out of doors struggled, with fluttering garments, to turn the street-corners, where the howling storm furiously lashed the water in the spring, and played ball with whatsoever was not nailed fast. It had turned bitterly cold, but Aunt Sophie put out the fire in the stove, and stood the humming tea-kettle upon the table—today one's inward warmth had to be sufficient, said she, not another spark of fire should fly up the chimney. She had once more made the rounds of the whole house, examined all the doors, windows and lutherns, and said she should not be surprised if the roof of the main-building would take a stroll as far as the market-place—it was terrible upstairs.

There was no cozy family gathering on this day. The counsellor wanted no food, and remained upstairs; Reinhold, too, after drinking a cup of tea in moody silence, withdrew to his room with his unconquerable rage at the destruction of the warehouse. So Aunt Sophie and Margarete watched alone during the threatening night. Neither did the servants go to bed. They sat together in the kitchen; shivering, the maids tucked their arms under their aprons, and the men chewed their cold pipes, and in mute anxiety listened to the raging voice of the storm. It seemed as if it would destroy like a child's toy the little, old town which for a thousand years had nestled as a faithful sentinel at the gate of the Thuringian Forest, defying all storms, all the vicissitudes of war. The earth

trembled beneath its shocks, tiles and timbers rolled from the roofs and broke into pieces upon the sidewalk, and with the noise it mingled like an unearthly, sorrowful lament, as if under the footsteps of the rushing wind without the buried sleepers in the quiet spot before the gate had awakened and were wandering searchingly through the streets in which they had once walked.

At about twelve o'clock the door of the room opened, and Barbe appeared upon the threshold, quite pale, shuddering with horror, and the forefinger of her right hand pointing towards the ceiling. There was dreadful tramping like the sound of a horseman's boots upstairs in the corridor, and between times there was knocking and thumping, as if someone were locked in and wanted to get out, she whispered, her teeth chattering, but again disappeared immediately behind the softly closed door, when Aunt Sophie, without uttering a word, rose from the sofa-corner, lighted the storm-lantern and with Margarete left the room.

Up above in the hall they were met by a draught which threatened to drive them back. Upon the last *buffet* burned the counsellor's large lamp, and the doors leading to the corridor were wide open. From this point there was a whistling and roaring as though Arthur's chase was rushing through the long, dark gulf. Aunt Sophie hastily bore the lamp, whose flame was fanned by the wind, to the screened *buffet*, and meanwhile Margarete, with uplifted lantern, stepped into the corridor.

The storm had broken the window at the end of the passage, its icy blast came in directly from the heavens; it banged the open casement hither and thither, and played upon the pictures, a part of which already lay upon the floor—that was probably the tapping and knocking that had been heard. But the window was so small—through

this narrow square it was impossible that the violent tornado which met the girl and filled corridor and hall with its raging could have entered. Margarete struggled forward ; suddenly she recoiled.

She was standing at the short flight of stairs which led sideways to the garret of the warehouse ; it had always been a dark, secluded corner ; but now the sky with its stars looked in through the skeleton roof of the warehouse, the unused door hung half upon its hinges, and in the doorway, holding his ground with difficulty against the blast, stood her father.

He saw the lanternlight which fell upon the boards of the attic without, and turned. "Is it you, Gretchen?" he

asked. "Does the noise make you wander through the house? It looks very badly up here. The bit of work by human hands is falling to pieces as at the trombone-blasts of the last judgment—it discloses not only the sun, but the storm as well, my child!" he added, with a strange smile, which puzzled her. "You see, for hundreds of years mysterious darkness reigned beneath the old roof, and now the stars shine upon the floor, and one fancies one can see the footprints of those who formerly walked here."

He ascended the stairs; Aunt Sophie too came up the corridor. She clasped her hands. "For heaven's sake, has the storm designs upon us? This is a veritable desert!" she scolded, indignantly, pointing to the open door. "Within the memory of man not a soul has touched that lock, and now—— The door must be closed at once, if we do not want the house filled with rats!"

"Rats? It seemed to me just now as if a white dove flew in," said the counsellor again, with his mocking, bitter smile, while his lips quivered painfully.

Aunt Sophie was startled. "Well, that alone was lacking, that the dove-cote should be unroofed!" she cried, boldly stepping out a few paces in order to look through the balcony-rails towards the roof of the weaving-house where her feathered pets were housed.

The counsellor turned away with a shrug of his shoulders, and went down into the room on the ground-floor. He soon returned with the coachman and the man-servant, who were carrying a ladder and pieces of timber. With difficulty did they succeed in pushing the door to, then the beams were put firmly against it.

"Perhaps it was a good thing that the storm beat in here once," Margarete heard the coachman at his work say in an undertone to the other, while she with her father and Aunt Sophie was picking up the overturned pictures.

"The apparition always tries to get out here! I once saw it with my own eyes—it must now be about ten years since then—when the white veil-like cloud rushed through the passage to the corner, as if going directly into the open air—yes! Then the world was nailed up with boards ; and the veil brushed against the wall—always the same story, ever since the lady died and could not enter heaven! But now there has been an air-hole made, just large enough to allow such a poor little woman's spirit to escape —it would be lucky for the family and I should be glad on account of her peace of mind. She certainly did not deserve it ; for she it was who persuaded her lover that he need not keep his promise to his first wife. Women are always to blame for such a piece of falseness, always!"

The mind wafted every word distinctly to where the members of the family were at work and the criticism of his ancestors coming from the meddlesome lips of a servant must have vexed the proud counsellor greatly— Margarete saw him raise his clinched fist as though he would strike the speaker ; but he contented himself with an angry : "Hurry up! Forwards!" whereupon the coachman in affright left the ladder, and climbed up to the small window which was to be barricaded if possible.

Margarete left the corridor, and for a moment stepped into the nearest window of the hall. From a number of the windows of the main-building bright lamplight fell into the court, upon the rustling elm-tree tops and the splashing water of the well, and with sorrow the young girl saw that the stone well-nymph above the four mouths was gone—the storm had torn her down, as well as a large piece of cornice on the roof of the haunted wing, over which yawning breach ran a broad streak of light from the upper hall-windows. The occupants were awake, too.

Suddenly her father stood by her side, while the two

men with their ladder noisily trudged toward the exit. He laid his hand heavily upon his daughter's shoulder and pointed up to the lamplight lying immovable upon the roof. "That looks as quiet in the midst of the tumult, as proudly calm as the inmates of our aristocratic upper *étage* themselves. . . . If they knew! Tomorrow there will be a storm up there, a storm as furious as the one beneath which our old house is trembling now!"

At this juncture Aunt Sophie turned the corner of the passage with the lantern, and he ceased abruptly. "Until tomorrow, my child!" said he, pressing the young girl's hand ; then he took up the lamp from the *buffet* and withdrew to his chamber.

After midnight the fury of the storm decreased. Lights in the houses of the town were extinguished, and the anxious occupants sought their well-deserved rest. The Lamprecht house, too, was quiet. Barbe alone tossed upon her pillow and could not sleep, so vexed was she—there was no genuine, firm faith nor any dependence in the world. Now those two silly men, the coachman and Friedrich, talked just like the family, and maintained that it was the pictures, and only just before they had sat in the kitchen as pale as chalk, and vowed that the knocking and stamping up above in the corridor could be nothing but ghosts. But patience—it would come yet—it would come!

The next morning all was as quiet as it possibly could be. The sun flooded the ruins, from the shattered towers and church-roofs to the overturned garden-fence, with warm, glittering golden rays, and charmed from out the remnants of broken glass a veritable brilliance as of diamonds. Yes, the storm had worked much havoc, and the laborers would have their hands full for some time in repairing the damage.

At break of day a messenger came from Dambach with

unhappy tidings. The storm had damaged the factory to such an extent that it was feared business would be interfered with for some time. Thereupon the counsellor rode thither early in the morning. He looked quite bright and drank his coffee very calmly first, said Aunt Sophie in response to Margarete's anxious inquiries, for she was still asleep when he went off. To be sure, he had a look of care upon his face; it would be no small matter if the factory stopped work, and besides that it would cost a large sum to repair the rear-buildings alone, for it looked terrible by daylight.

Margarete stepped upon the doorsteps of the side-wing, and gazed at the desolate court; at this moment her uncle, booted and spurred, his riding-whip in his hand, came out of the main-building and went towards the stables. Either he really did not see the old man, or the principle in the main-building according to which the existence of the occupants of the warehouse was to be ignored if possible, was observed by him; suffice it to say, he stepped into the stable-door without returning the courteous greeting of Decorator Lenz, who was standing in the neighborhood of the well.

The old, white-haired man, as it seemed, had climbed over the heap of *débris* which shut off the entire warehouse, in order to gather up the pieces of the broken spring-nymph. He had just picked up the head of the statue out of the grass, when Margarete approached him, and extended her hand with a hearty greeting. She had always liked him, the ever-gay old artist, who looked at the world with such kindly, sincere eyes through his spectacles; and today she recalled the moment when she as a child in her disconsolate loneliness had clung to his breast with the blissful sense of security. She never forgot that.

He was as pleased as a child to see her again, and gaily

replied to her sympathetic inquiries after his sick wife that all was well at home, if for the time being they lacked a roof over their heads. The storm had been very violent, its most sacrilegious dread being however the destruction of the spring-nymph, a rare work of art, which had always

been the apple of his eye. And he now discoursed about the fine lines of the nymph's head in his hands, and about the numbers of famous female statues of the ancient world, a theme into which Margarete eagerly entered, so much the more so as the old man showed an excellent understanding of art. . . . Meanwhile the young counsellor again appeared in the stable-door; he had bowed to the young girl from there, and now he slowly paced to and fro under the elms waiting.

Margarete had returned his greeting with only a nod of her head—the manner in which the haughty bureaucrat isolated himself vexed her—he need not be there for her either. Walking on as they talked, she accompanied the old decorator through the courtyard to the warehouse; arrived there, she leaped upon the heap of *débris*, and extended a helping hand to him, who was ascending it with difficulty. Light as she was, the loose beams cracked and gave way beneath her feet, and every cautious step taken by the old man caused it to shake.

Suddenly the counsellor's statuesque composure turned to animation. He flung his riding-whip upon the garden-table, and hurried towards the ruins. Silently he mounted the nearest timber, and held up his arms in order to support the tottering girl and to help her down.

"Oh, no indeed, uncle! You would risk the seams of your new gloves!" she cried, with a half-smile, and only turning her head a little in his direction, while her eyes anxiously followed the last effort of the old man who had at length reached *terra firma* in safety. "Adieu, Herr Lenz!" she called to him in a friendly tone, then she stepped to one side and bounded like a feather over the protruding pieces of wood to the ground.

"That was an unnecessary piece of boldness which one woud scarcely admire," said the counsellor, frostily, as he

shook from his foot a small piece of lath which had fallen down.

"Boldness?" she repeated, incredulously. "Do you really think there is danger in it? The rotten boards down here will not crush anyone now."

His eyes covertly scanned her delicate, supple form. "It depends upon *who* falls between these nail-spiked ruins——"

"Ah, according to that you do not count the good old decorator among the physically and morally invulnerable? You stirred neither hand nor foot to help him over, nor did you return his polite greeting before that."

He looked fixedly and keenly into her eyes, which sparkled with bitter indignation. "A greeting is like small coin, it goes from hand to hand and clings to no one's fingers," he replied, calmly. "But if you think that narrow-minded pride prevents me from returning a greeting, you are mistaken—I did not see the man——"

"Not when he was standing there next me?"

"You think I should have come up and have expressed my opinion with regard to the nymph's torso?" he interrupted her, and a smile flitted about his mouth. "Would you really like him upon whom you cannot bestow the respectful title of uncle often enough to expose himself to ridicule in his old days? . . . I understand nothing of these things, and if I did take an interest in the subject, I have never had the time to inquire into it."

"Oh, time and taste enough, uncle!" laughed she. "I remember distinctly how there under the kitchen-windows" —she pointed towards the main-building—"a tall boy stood, his pockets filled with gravel, and for hours pelted the poor spring-nymph with the pretty round stones——"

"Ah—so there is yet a time within your recollection when I, too, was young in your eyes——"

"'Primitive' you mean, uncle! A time when the diplomatist's frock-coat had not yet imposed the slightest reserve, where the ladder of fame was dimly to be seen in the distance; a time when anger and passion glowed in your eyes, and your hand governed—I felt it, there!" She pointed to the group of garden furniture under the elms. "God knows in what corner it is now withering unheeded, the white rose, for which at that time a struggle was made with a fire, an exasperation as great as if it were the beautiful, fair maiden herself!"

She saw him blush repeatedly with satisfaction. Of all those who flattered the minister *in spe*, the future relative of the princely house, certainly none had ventured to remind him of this "youthful folly"—she did so with delight. He would blush for himself when he compared that first enthusiastic love with his selfishness and hardness of heart of the present day.

But he looked neither ashamed nor confused. He turned away and glanced at the ruined gallery of the warehouse, which formerly with its wealth of green, climbing plants had served as a frame for the most beautiful maiden's visage. All had vanished like a magical charm. The falling roof had torn down in its fall the network of vines, and had buried it to the tiniest leaflet beneath the bits of glass and the beams, and the maiden? Since she had passed through the warehouse gate to go into the wide world not a human eye had seen her again, no one had ever heard of her.

"Fate Morgana!" said he to himself, half-aloud, as if lost in the memory of the past. He had awhile since smiled slightly at the mention of the ladder of fame, and now, too, the same expression hovered about his lips, while a slight blush rose to his cheeks. "Not alone the rose, but, too, a blue silken ribbon which the wind blew down into the

court from her fair head, and several bits of paper scribbled upon, which were carelessly thrown over the gallery-balustrade, still lie as faithfully guarded relics in the portfolio of those days," said he, half-ironically, and yet with emotion. He shook his head. "That you should remember the occurrence!"

She laughed. "It is not wonderful! At that moment I was afraid of you, and your silent, pale rage; such a thing a child forgets as little as an act of arbitrariness against which its sense of justice rebels. The great senior wrangler always thundered against theft, when 'dainty-mouthed Grete's' fingers slyly came into contact with grandmama's fruit-plate, and then he himself secretly grabbed at pretty Blanka's property and hid it in his breast-pocket."

He now laughed too. "And since that moment you have been my adversary——"

"No, uncle, you have a wretched memory. We were never good friends, not before that. You could never endure your sister's first-born, and as a result I vexed you all I could. This score has always been honestly and fairly balanced."

While Margarete spoke his brow darkened, and he became serious. "That might of course have been settled," said he; "nevertheless you are bent upon now having a reckoning with me——"

"Now, when I am earnestly endeavoring to respect you for your title and dignity?" She shrugged her shoulders with a smile. "It seems you have taken offence at the temerity with which I reminded you of the *rosa blanca;* and you are right, too, it was overhasty and not very tactful. But it is strange; since I have talked with the old man a fatal day of my childhood has risen so vividly before my eyes that I cannot shake off the recollection. I saw

the decorator's daughter for the last time—she was pale, with tear-swollen eyes, and her rich, fair hair hung loosely down her back. From a tiny child I always had an almost absurd weakness for maidenly beauty—to my uncle's vexation the living, slender Greek maidens interested me as much as the unearthed images, and in Vienna I followed a lovely Servian through lanes and streets; and yet all these latest apparitions have not been able to crowd out the picture of Blanka Lenz. . . . Inquiry for her was on my tongue, nevertheless it was not uttered; it suddenly seemed to me as if I should hurt the father by the mention of his daughter's name. The girl had vanished so utterly—I believe no one in our house knows what become of her. Perhaps——" She paused and looked with eloquent roguishness at him.

"I do not know either, Margarete," he assured, with humor. "Since the morning on which she departed, and the 'senior wrangler' in his wild despair wondered if it was worth while to live on or if a bullet through the heart would be preferable, I have never heard from her again. I felt as you did, I was unable to forget her for a long, long time, until suddenly—the right one came; for notwithstanding all this it was not she."

Margarete looked up at him in surprise—his words were uttered with such genuine, deep conviction that not the slightest doubt of the depth of his feeling remained in her mind. He really loved this Heloise von Taubeneck. He did not aspire to her hand for the sake of his career, as the wicked world maintained—no, he would have wooed her had she been the decorator's daughter. Papa was right in asserting that Herbert, with all his burning ambition, his strong aspirations, would nevertheless avoid the crooked way.

Meanwhile the servant repeatedly appeared in the stable-

door, and the counsellor now beckoned to him. His horse was led out, and he mounted it.

"You are going to Prince's Court?" asked Margarete, as she laid her hand within his right, which he again offered her from his horse's back.

"To Prince's Court and still farther," he replied. "The storm in that direction was very severe, so I have been told." With a slight pressure he released her hand, which up to this time he had held in his, and rode away.

Involuntarily Margarete stood and looked after him until he had disappeared behind the pillars of the main-building gate. She had misjudged him, and what was still worse, she had repeatedly expressed to him her opinion in an insulting manner that was painful. . . . And he really loved that cold, fat, phlegmatic Heloise, the exact opposite of the graceful dragon-fly which once had fluttered amid the green network of leaves! Incomprehensible! But Aunt Sophie was right! "Ah, where love does light!" she always said, with a shrug of her shoulders, when she spoke of the "wonder of the world" that really and truly someone had in days of yore fallen in love with her big nose. . . . With head bowed in meditation she walked slowly back to the door of the side-wing. There in the grass beside the basin lay the nymph's broken hand. She picked it up, and at the sight of the characteristic form she was reminded of the old artist's various hypotheses relative to the statue's antique original—but only for a moment; then her eyes fell, and dreamily she ascended the door-steps; the most interesting problem was and remained—the human soul!

CHAPTER XV.

LATER on the courtyard was filled with workmen. The clearing up of the *débris* caused a noise which speedily drove the young girl out of her courtyard room. . . . Now again as formerly she again sat by the window in the sitting-room, and dipped her pen in the large china inkstand which years ago had been to blame for so many blots in the exercise-books and upon the aprons of the awkward Grete. She was trying to write to her uncle in Berlin, but she could not find the right matter; her thoughts were continually fleeing before the anxiety which possessed her since that night. "Tomorrow there will be a storm upstairs as violent as that which is now shaking our old house!" her father had said, pointing to the upper story. What was to and must happen there was an enigma to her. Between her father and their relatives up there the best of understanding seemed to exist; not the slightest trace of a conflict was visible; yet there must be differences which had become by degrees unbearable to the head of the house of Lamprecht, for he wanted to "put an end to it" at any price.

Beneath the windows of the main-building it was not much quieter than in the courtyard. It was market-day. Haggling for butter, eggs and fruit could be heard, and

emptied wood and grain wagons rolled homewards over the pavement. Then along the market-place went the choir recruited from among the pupils of the higher schools. . . . B—— was one of the Thuringian towns which still kept up this ancient custom which owed its origin to the mendicant friars and the latter Bacchante.

Like a flock of rooks they came along, the boys and youths in their round, black cloaks, and black caps drawn over their young brows. Such an one, too, was Aunt Sophie's pet hero, Martin Luther, and of the same mind as his patroness, the noble Frau Cotta of Eisenach ; she supplied year in year out dinner for two poor students from her own pocket.

In front of the druggist's they sang a choral, and soon after they formed a circle before the Lamprecht domicile, and intoned the hymn : "*Es ist bestimmt in Gottes Rat.*" They sang "badly and correctly" in their voices drilled by the town-chorister, voices which were so young and knew nothing as yet of soul or expression ; yet these tones touched Margarete's heart, and a feeling of dread anxiety stole over her—yes, the terrible fright of the preceding day, the fury of the storm and the present inward strain made themselves felt ; she was, strange to say, somewhat nervous.

Aunt Sophie entered, repeatedly inspected the dinner-table and drove off a fly from the fruit-dish. "It must look bad out at the factory, your father does not come back," said she to the young girl at the window. "Barbe is grumbling in her kitchen and bemoaning her pastry, which will be spoilt." And after a glance out of the window across the market-place, where the pupils were just disbanding, and the anxiously-awaited horseman nowhere to be seen, she said : "You might run upstairs quickly, Grete. The locksmith is there repairing the

attic-door. I am afraid he will not be careful with the pictures leaning against the wall."

Margarete went upstairs past the unscathed pictures. The pieces of timber used as props were removed, and the door open as it had been the night before. The locksmith was working on the loosened hinge, and without under the open roof carpenters were busy.

She stepped out upon the creaking attic-floor, beneath the strong brown rafters which pointed towards the blue sky. Now the clear October sun lay upon the trace of a foot of which her father had spoken that night. She shook her head—dainty soles had certainly never walked upon these rough, unplaned boards, at the most but the pegged boots of the former packers. To be sure old houses have their secrets, and to the Sunday-children the eyes of house-sprites glitter from beneath the veil-like clouds of dust and cobwebs, and the murmur of clandestine deeds and other terrible things come from every corner. But why the storm should have unearthed an unsolved problem just here in the former resting-place of uncaptious balls of flax she could not understand any more than she did on the night when papa talked so strangely.

A rather strong breeze was blowing, which made the young girl's hair flutter. She drew a small, black lace shawl out of her pocket, tied it over her head and was about to enter the granary when loud outcries from the open kitchen-windows made her pause. Not a face was to be seen at the windows, but at this moment the coachman rushed into the courtyard and ran towards the stable, while a number of other people, who did not belong to the house, followed him. The workmen leaped from the pile of ruins, and in a trice a crowd of human beings were pressing around a peasant, who, with panting breath, spoke in

such a timid, hushed voice as if he feared the walls might re-echo his words.

"Behind the Dambach thicket," reached her ears, and "they found him behind the Dambach thicket," suddenly said a voice close to the half-open door of the nearest attic chamber. It was an apprentice, who had come up from below. "His horse was tied to a tree," he went on, breathlessly, "and he lay upon the moss—the market-women thought he was sleeping. They have now taken him back to the factory. Such a rich man as he, who has many hundreds of factory hands, a coachman and servants under him, and yet so alone has he——" He ceased in affright at the sight of the pallid girlish face beneath the black lace shawl, of the large, horrified eyes and the slender form, which, with arms hanging lifelessly, passed him and his companions like the form of a somnambulist. She did not ask: "Is he dead?" Her pale lips were closed almost convulsively. Silently she glided from door to door, down the stairs of the warehouse, and through the open door into the street.

Now with hurried footsteps she passed through the secluded, quiet streets, taking the same way she had once taken when she ran away lest she should be sent to an institute. . . . To be sure she did not recall that time now; nor did she pass through waving cornfields, flooded with the glow of the July evening sun; broad expanses of stubble, from which soared flocks of crows, stretched before her. She did not even hear the cawing of the birds, the only sound to be heard; it seemed to her as if the chorus of scholars was walking beside and behind her. She heard constantly "*Es ist bestimmt in Gottes Rat!*" . . . Then for several seconds she would stop, and, moaning, press her hands to her ears and close her eyes. No, the worst had not happened! Not like a slender stalk of corn,

which one single stroke of the scythe lays low, did such a strongly-knit form give way; not so did the grim reaper lay hold of the lofty-minded human plans and resolutions, and suddenly drive decisive words from the lips! Her feet flew on across the open plain, up the incline and through the crackling leaves with which the storm had that night strewn the path back of the little wood. She could not get there quickly enough in order to rid herself of the unspeakable anguish, in order to see that it was but an attack of dizziness, that all was again well, everything as usual, that his voice addressed her as always, his eyes looked at her, and that this horrible hour had passed like a dreadful dream.

"They found him behind the Dambach thicket," rang however again in her ear; her foot now hesitated, and the sweetly-deceptive belief in a mistaken dream disappeared. There had it occurred where the birches and beeches mingled! There the ground had been trodden by the feet

of men like the lists, there enormous boughs had been broken from the trees in order to clear the way. Her strength gave way as at a blow, and when the wood and the first village houses finally lay behind her, and the factory-buildings were but a stone's throw away, she leaned with trembling limbs against one of the elms, which, being opposite the gate of the factory-court, afforded shade to the recreation ground of the workmen.

Many of the factory hands stood in groups in the court-yard, but not the sound of a human voice came from thence; only the tread of a horse's hoofs was to be heard—it was Herbert's bay which was being led up and down. At the same moment that Margarete reached the elms, the counsellor stepped out of the garden into the factory courtyard, and almost simultaneously an equipage turned from the highway and rolled up to the gate. As through a mist the young girl saw fluttering ribbons and waving plumes—the ladies from Prince's Court were in the carriage.

"For God's sake, dearest counsellor, reassure me!" cried Baroness Taubeneck to Herbert, who approached the carriage-door and bowed. He was as pale as a corpse. "Heavenly Father! How you look! Then the horrible, incredible news just told me by the upper bailiff of Hermsleben is true? Our poor, dear counsellor——"

"He is alive, uncle—he is alive, is he not?" said a beseeching voice, stifled with grief and pain, close beside him, while hot fingers pressed his hand.

He turned in affright. "For God's sake, Margarete——"

The ladies in the carriage leaned forward and stared at the wealthy merchant's daughter, who, overheated and dusty, in a simple morning-gown and with a black shawl tied about her head, had come hither like a maid-servant. "How, Fraulein Lamprecht, your niece, dear counsellor?"

asked the stout lady, with hesitation, but with the unbounded curiosity which thrusts itself forward even in the most critical moments.

He made no reply, and Margarete did not even have a glance for the future aristocratic mother-in-law—in this moment of horror what did she remember of the relations of these three people to one another? In wild anguish she fastened her eyes upon Herbert's disturbed face.

"Margarete——" He said no more, but his tone of sorrow told her all. She shuddered, pushed his hand, to which she still clung, from her, and crossed the courtyard to the villa.

"She seems greatly grieved—she has totally lost her head," she heard beautiful Heloise's clear, cold voice say compassionately behind her. "How else would it have

happened that she should go through the streets of the town in that guise!"

In the hall of the villa two doctors from town were standing preparatory to leaving, with them was the foreman's wife in tears, while whispered words about apoplexy and a beautiful, enviable death fell upon Margarete's ear. Without raising her eyes she glided past the speakers and entered the room in which her father usually stayed. Yes, there he lay upon the couch—his handsome, pallid face contracting strongly with the dark-red cushions—a peaceful sleeper, from whose brow all dark problems had been erased by the hand of Death. At his feet sat grandpapa, his white head buried in his hands.

The old man looked up when his granddaughter in mute grief sank beside the couch—he was not surprised to see her arrive on foot so "upset," he knew his Grete. In silence, gently, he drew her to him, and there upon his faithful breast the relieving tears at length burst forth.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the hall, between the doors of the large *salon* and the middle window opposite, was the traditional spot where all who in life bore the name of Lamprecht once more appeared in a brilliant though mute farewell *role* before they moved into the damp stone vault without upon the quiet square at the gate. Here, too, had lain wicked Frau Judith, a smiling radiance upon her irascible countenance—yet she willingly gave up her desperate struggle with death after the binding promise, with difficulty obtained, from her spouse, and disposed her thin, ugly form to everlasting rest.

And here among the foreign, blooming plants which were placed around the silver-trimmed casket of the rich lady was Herr Justus Lamprecht said to have seen the lovely Dore for the first time. She was the orphaned daughter of a business friend, who in his will had named Herr Justus her guardian. And one evening, it was said, a traveling-coach drew up at the Lamprecht house, and as no one heeded the vehicle, although a crowd of people was flocking into the house and up the brightly-lighted stairs, the new arrival slipped out of the carriage and followed the crowd until with terrified eyes she stood in the presence of the dead wife. This was her first entrance into the house of her future husband, "a very bad omen," and, too, for that reason did it come about later that she laid after a few years on the same spot in her coffin, like a beautiful wax-image, with her dead child in her arms, and, although it was winter, literally covered with costly flowers brought from a distance; and the white silk of her burial-

gown was spread out over the coffin and covered the hall floor for yards like snow. People related this yet.

Since then many a silent face had had to allow the last whispered rites to be performed over it in this spot; fathers and sons, mothers and daughters all had rested in this place, and alternating with the old, weary members of the family, many a manly form prematurely stricken had lain there. But the hall had never harbored a corpse like this last deceased Lamprecht. Old women, who, with the stream of curious, with difficulty climbed the stairs, knew that full well; during their entire lives they had not one single time failed to come when the mourning-hall was prepared in the Lamprecht house. And they were right in their assertion—this grand looking man lay there as if he would and must every minute rise, surprised at his strange bed, shake off the flowers, stretch his limbs and stare mockingly at the curious with his fiery eyes! . . . And the men, who whispered one to the other, were right, too, when they said the last, strong column of the old house was broken with him—what would come now? The slender figure which glided to and fro, the thin neck forced into a stiff collar, rubbing his thin fingers constantly together as he shivered with the cold, was so pitiful to look at beside the handsome corpse, that one could not possibly esteem this heir.

It had been feared that the fright of the sudden catastrophe would, too, prove fatal for him; but he was not really so very much frightened; he looked far more surprised than frightened, and on the first day he went around as if in a dream. Afterwards the coolness of his manner struck the people in the counting-house more than it had before, and on account of this composure and objectiveness it astonished no one that on the second day he tried to see how the empty office chair of his deceased father fit.

The last solemnities were over. The greater part of those assembled had dispersed; only here and there a few hesitated, a few who could not gaze sufficiently upon this "last time" with its grandeur and magnificence. The principal participants in the ceremonies, the divines, the ladies of Prince's Court, the adjutant representing the duke and the most intimate friends of the family, were still in the large drawing-room, where, too, were assembled the deceased's relatives. Only the daughter of the house was absent. She had retired behind the dark drapery of the middle window. As if wounded, she had fled into this dark corner. *Had* this ceremonial to be, this horrible exhibition of the dead and of the deep grief of the survivors? Here, where it seemed to her as if she could hear the suddenly interrupted accords of a human life in its last vibrations, where she thought the beating of the wings of the departed soul should tremble with reactive force, here had the upholsterers hammered and pounded all day, and litters filled with orangery were borne upstairs.

And had it to be that a crowd of strange faces should press around the coffin, while the divine uttered touching words of eulogy? But the more, the greater the honors for the family! With every carriage grandmama's form seemed to increase in height, for she was doing the honors. . . . And what thoughtless words passed from mouth to mouth! A stranger entering might have thought the deceased had all his life been a miserable cripple, in every respect a suffering, deformed person, for he was envied "the everlasting rest, the calling home from this world."

"He is well off!" It was spoken with all sorts of variations; but none of these fair talkers knew that in the last hours of his life a secret mission occupied his entire mind and had irresistibly urged him to its fulfilment.

He had no suspicion that death was riding with him when he left his house. At the factory he was the most composed of all those agitated by the havoc wrought. He had examined the damage done and had given his orders, then he rode homeward—and it had seized him. Attacked by vertigo, he had dismounted, finding still sufficient strength to tie fast the fiery animal and to lie down upon the soft, leaf-strewn, mossy ground. But who could tell what horror the suddenly dawning sense of death had called up behind the brow now so smooth and cold? Snatched away without having fulfiled "that which should have been completed," did so complete a sense of oblivion steel over the departing soul that "all was well," as these people said?

The last of those present in the hall had departed, and it had grown so solemnly still that above the hushed murmur of voices in the *salon* could be heard the crackling of the wax-tapers. . . . Then Artist Lenz came out of the deep, shadowy background of the hall; he had probably stood there unobserved during the entire ceremony. The old man was not alone, his little grandson was with him, and walked at his grandfather's bidding towards the podium, which was draped in black and raised several steps, and upon which the coffin stood. The boy was about to set his foot upon the first of these steps, when Reinhold rushed out of the *salon* as if he were mad.

"You cannot get up there, child!" he cried, breathlessly, in a suppressed voice, but evidently very angry, pushing the boy back by his arm.

"Allow my grandchild to kiss the hand which——" The old decorator was allowed to say no more, modestly as he uttered his request.

"It cannot be, Lenz—you should have sense enough for that yourself!" interrupted the young man, with abrupt

THE COUNSELLOR TOOK THE BOY IN HIS ARMS AND HELD HIM ABOVE THE COFFIN. (P. 220)

evasion. "What should we have done if all our workmen had approached us with that object in view? And you will concede that your grandson has not any more right than the children of our other employés——"

"No, Herr Lamprecht, I cannot concede that," replied the old man, hastily. The blood suffused his face. "Your father was——"

"My God, yes," agreed Reinhold, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders. "Papa was, to be sure, often incomprehensibly indulgent; nevertheless it cannot be supposed that he would have allowed the boy to take such a liberty in the presence of aristocratic friends," he pointed in the direction of the *salon*. "So I must, therefore, refuse him. . . . Go away!" He pushed the child away, and pointed toward the door. "Your kiss of the hand is not necessary!"

Indignantly Margarete drew back the black curtain, and stepped out of the recess. At the same moment Herbert came hurriedly out of the *salon*—he had been standing near the door. Without a word, he took the boy by his hand, and, passing Reinhold, led him up the steps.

"I had rather kiss his mouth!" said the boy, turning his pale face away from the waxen hands embedded in flowers, to his guide in his abrupt, curt manner. "He kissed me sometimes, *too*—you know, in the gateway, when we were quite alone."

The counsellor hesitated a moment, then he took the boy in his arms and held him above the coffin. Then the beautiful childish head bent low over the "quiet man," so that his brown locks brushed the cold brow, and kissed him upon his bearded lips.

To the young girl, who still held apart with both hands the black draperies, a gleam of light seemed to pass over the grieved face, and a grateful glance was cast at him who

with a grave, resolute protest thrust aside unkindness from the sacred spot.

Meanwhile the guests who were on the point of departing had come noiselessly out of the *salon*.

"Lord, how touching!" breathed Baroness Taubeneck, as the counsellor descended the steps and gently released the boy from his grasp. "But what can ail me?" The lady turned to Frau Amtsratin. "I cannot with the best of wills remember that such a young relative existed in the family."

"You are quite right, madame; my sister and I are the sole survivors," interrupted Reinhold, with angry bitterness. "The affectionate caress was but gratitude for past benefits; otherwise the boy has absolutely no interest in our family—he belongs to the man over there!" At these words he pointed to the old artist, who silently took the child's hand, and, with a grateful bow to the counsellor, left the hall.

It was as if the sound of the human voice went with him, a silence so deep, so embarrassed ensued. The opposition so inopportunely raised at the deceased's coffin, may have painfully moved the feelings of all. Not another word was uttered. With silent inclinations they parted, and soon after the carriages drove from below in all directions.

"It is a pity that you had to leave us so soon, Balduin!" murmured the old Amtsrat, sorrowfully. "Heaven keep the poor people over whom the heartless fellow now has power, who must come under his scourge!"

The old gentleman remained alone in the hall with his granddaughter, while the others sped the parting guests. "Come, put an end to this, Gretel! Be brave!" he implored, stroking the curly hair of the weeping maiden who was kneeling upon the uppermost step wrung by the bitter agony of parting. She kissed the cold hand—she

felt as though she dared not brush away the breath of the childish mouth upon the lips of the dead—then she arose, and, taking her grandfather's hand, went into the adjoining room.

"Now, my dear Gretel, the worst has been through with!" said he, within. "And now, for God's sake, do you go to Berlin for a couple of weeks. There you will be more likely to be roused, there your poor, worried brain will regain its equilibrium. Then, too, think of your old grandfather. It will be very lonesome in our dear Dambach, for—he will not come there any more!" There was a convulsive quiver around his white moustache. "He was a good son to me, my child; although his peculiar manner always remained a sealed book to me."

With these words he went out and closed the door behind him, and Margarete fled to the remotest room, to the red *salon*. She knew that that outside would go out with the light of the tapers, the last radiance of an existence in the eyes of the world very much favored; that the last preparations for the removal to the quiet little house at the gate would be made early in the morning. . . . Yes, the next day at this time all was over, and she, too, was far, far away from the orphaned home! That very day with the last train Uncle Theobald came from Berlin to the burial, and the following morning he left, taking her with him.

She paced to and fro in the dimly-lighted room, from whose broad, high walls her every step was given back. The recently cleared *bel-étage* had been hurriedly refurnished, but only scantily—there was no carpets, and the entire collection of portraits still stood in the corridor of the side-wing. A large square mark discolored the faded paper—there had hung the portrait of the lady with the rubies, the beautiful, adored, whose poor soul had been

doomed to wander, according to horrible superstition, for hundreds of long years in the old merchants' house, until the storm forced its way in and was said to have borne her away on its wings. . . . Oh, the power of the storm! At that time the orphan had looked into her father's eyes for the last time! "Until tomorrow, my child!" he had said—those were his last words to her; that "morrow" never came, never! She pressed her brow between her hands, and ran from wall to wall.

The drawing-room door opened. Herbert entered, and with a searching glance he passed through the suite of rooms. He wore his overcoat and held his hat in his hand.

Margarete paused as he stepped upon the threshold, and her hand slowly dropped from her forehead.

"Have they left you so entirely alone, Margarete?" he asked, with tender compassion, as years ago she had often heard him address the delicate child, Reinhold. He entered, threw down his hat and seized the young girl's hands. "How cold and stiff you are! This gloomy, desolate room is no place for you. Come, go over with me!" he besought gently, raising his arm to lay it protectingly about her form; but she drew back several steps? "My eyes ache," said she hastily, terrified, from her dusky corner. "The subdued light does them good after the horrible glare in the hall. . . . Yes, it is desolate here; but quiet, sympathetically quiet—a veritable boon to the wounded soul after so many wise words of consolation!"

"There were, too, many well-meant words among them," he assured her. "I can understand that the concourse of people today and the lying-in-state have wounded your feelings. But you must not forget that our dear departed attached great importance to all such publicity—

the brilliant celebration was quite as he would have liked it. That may be some comfort to you, Margarete!"

He hesitated a moment, as if awaiting a word from her lips; but she remained silent, and he again took up his hat." 'I am going to drive to the station to meet Uncle Theobald. He will know better than any of us how to soothe your grief; therefore, I am pleased that he is coming. But *must* you return with him to Berlin, as my father just told me?"

"Yes, I must go!" she answered, hurriedly." I myself have never realized how well off I was until now—one accepts a life of happiness just as naturally as one breathes, and is almost unconscious of doing so. Now, for the first time a great misfortune has come upon me, and I am not equal to it, I am powerless in the face of it—it has a terrible power over me!" Involuntarily she again drew near him, and he saw that anguish with difficulty suppressed furrowed her brow. "It is terrible to have to follow one and the same line of thought! And yet I have not the strength to shake it off; I am even provoked at those from without who interrupt it. And it will not be any different here—so I must go away. Uncle has work for me, hard work, by means of which I will help myself out of this—he is compiling a new catalogue."

"And the people there are, too, much more sympathetic to you——"

"More sympathetic than grandpapa and Aunt Sophie? No!" she interrupted, with a shake of her head. "I am too much like them in temperament and character to allow others to put a grief between us."

"Those two are not your only relatives here, Margarete."

She made no reply.

"Ah, the poor creatures! Those in Berlin have no very difficult job!" said he, smiling bitterly. "The nobles

of Pomerania or Mecklenburg, or some other place, can calmly let their swords rest——" He ceased and blushed beneath her indignant glance. "Pardon!" he added, quickly. "I should not have said that—not in this time of sorrow!"

"Yes, in the time of trouble it is horrible to remind one of an ever-smiling face!" she agreed, almost violently. "I feel for the first time how one can dislike such well-fed, rosy, imperturbable people when one is deeply grieved. . . . One feels like a bowed form of grief, and beside one they tower blooming and composed, and in every feature is to be read: 'What is *that* to me?' The young mistress of Prince's Court stood thus by my side today at the casket —proud, fresh and cold to her very heart, her penetrating perfume almost stifled me, and the incessant rustle of her long train irritated my nerves beyond measure; I would have liked to have struck her."

"Margarete!" he interrupted. With a peculiar glance he seized her hand; but she freed it.

"Have no fear, uncle!" said she, harshly. "I have *that* much politeness left. And when I return——"

"After another five years, Margarete?" he again interrupted, looking anxiously in her face.

"No. Grandpapa desires my early return. I shall come back the beginning of December."

"Your word upon it, Margarete!" He spoke quickly, and again extended his right hand to her.

"What can it matter to *you?*" she asked, with a shrug of her shoulders and a shy glance of her tear-swollen eyes; yet for a moment she laid her cold fingertips in his hand.

The carriage which was to take the counsellor to the station had long since driven up to the door; and now Frau Amtsratin appeared in the large *salon*, and came through the suite of rooms. She looked as tiny as a child

in the plain woolen mourning gown, and the severe black of her crape cap made her delicate, faded little face look like that of a mummy. Beside the sadness, visible upon her face for the benefit of the public, at this moment was visible a sort of angry surprise.

"How do I find you *here*, Herbert?" she asked, pausing upon the threshold. "You excused yourself so hurriedly from our sympathetic friends, that I could only find an excuse for your haste in your proposed drive to the station. Now the carriage has been waiting in front of the house for some time, and you are standing here with our little girl, who will not listen to your words of consolation—I know Grete. . . . You will be late, dear son!"

A faint, indefinable smile hovered about the "dear son's" lips; but dutifully he took his hat and went silently out, while Frau Amtsratin drew her granddaughter's arm through hers, in order to lead her away. Upstairs in "grandmother's" *salon* it was nice and warm, and the tea-kettle was humming, the old lady said, in a sad, low-pitched

voice; Uncle Theobald would probably be very cold on his arrival, and a hot cup of tea would be necessary. . . . It was very much to be regretted that Uncle could not be present at the ceremonies—such an illustrious assemblage of mourners had never been seen in the Lamprecht household before; to be sure, there had always been enough of honorable repute, but never any aristocracy. Was not that the grandest termination of a proud man's life? A termination at which the angels in heaven must rejoice.

CHAPTER XVII.

WINTER had come, a winter of the true Thuringian order, when snow falls so fast over mountains and valleys that only the low roofs of the village houses peep through the silvery dust. . . . The small town, too, at the entrance to the Thuringian Forest received its share of the warm mantle of snow. White and smooth it lay there, weaving into itself millions of snow-crystals; all the damage done by the October storms, the patched walls, roofs and towers, and the new tiled roof of the warehouse in the Lamprecht courtyard, disappeared under the monotonous white cloak. And without, before the gilded iron gate of the half-open little stone building, whose trap-doors eight weeks before had closed over the Lamprecht last deceased, the snowflakes piled up an alabaster wall, an epitaph, and whosoever could read could see upon the glittering surface: "Keep away! what lies behind me has nothing more to do with you without!" Solitary sleepers! One after the other had they come hither, and each of the old merchants had secretly thought on leaving the beloved firm: "It will not succeed without you!" But it had gone on. The business had always tided

over the supposed gap, and the books afterwards had shown no loss.

So, too, had this last change been apparently accomplished without any disturbance. To be sure, Reinhold was still a minor, but he had passed his eighteenth year, and was shortly to be declared of age—an empty form whose accomplishment did not need to be awaited. The young merchant, with the cool principles of an older head, held the reins in his hands in the course of a few days, and everyone had to concede that he was firm in the saddle. The head bookkeeper and the foreman, who formerly had been intrusted with the guidance of the business, sank into nonentities beside him in strength and will, and only on rare occasions asserted their right of protestation—in consideration of the short duration of their office and the irritability of the heir. But the others, those in the office and the workmen in the factory, bent timidly and yet moodily over their work when the tall, nervous person, not at all imposing in bearing and proportions, but with eyes full of resolute, inexorable severity, appeared in the workrooms. His father, too, had been stern, and had seldom given his subordinates a pleasant word; but no one had ever appealed in vain to his sense of justice; this and his generosity with regard to the wages of his employés—"live and let live" had always been his motto—had, notwithstanding his haughtiness, endeared him to the hearts of all. His youthful successor criticised severely the course taken by the counsellor.

"That is all ended! Enough money slipped through papa's fingers—he lived like a lord, he was never a merchant!" said he, and he began to "do away" with the old routine. . . . A change was instituted over night.

Margarete had returned two days since. Aunt Sophie knew the hour of her arrival and drove in the carriage to

the station, and Frau Amtsratin had condescended to accompany her in order to take the orphan under her wing. But the old lady was not a little surprised to see her son step out of the coupé with her granddaughter. . . . He had been at the Residence for several weeks, having been a delegate of the Diet. "Special business" had taken him for a few hours to the next greatest station, he said, with a smile, and he was there delighted to meet his home-returning niece, and to be able to protect her during her ride of several hours. . . . The Frau Amtsratin shook her head angrily at this "unnecessary drive to and fro" in the cold. The "special business" could have been probably settled on the way home; but steam now made it all too easy for people to yield to every caprice.

And early the day before he had, by appointment, stopped at the door with the sleigh to take Margarete with him. He had some information to give his father about the rented property, he said, and it would be an excellent opportunity for her, too, to see her grandfather. . . . Then they flew away over the broad, white expanse. The sky was a compact mass of snow clouds, and gusts of icy wind blew about their ears and tore the veil from her face. Holding the reins with one hand, he quickly caught the fluttering gauze, slipped out of the sleeve of his capacious fur coat and wrapped the free part of this protecting cover about her form, which was trembling with the cold. "There!" said he, imperturbably, and in spite of her resistance he drew the fur still more closely about her. "Daughter and niece can allow a papa or an old uncle to do this without derogating from their maidenly dignity."

With a timid sidelong glance toward Prince's Court she said someone might possibly see them from there. "Well, and if they did, would that be any misfortune?" he had replied, with a smile. "The ladies would know that the

little bundle beside me could be no one but my little niece." . . . Yes, of course, lovely Heloise was so sure of him that a doubting thought could not possibly possess her!

Towards evening he went back to the Residence, to be present at a last meeting. So much had been crowded into the preceding day, that on the next Margarete just began to come to herself.

It was Sunday. Aunt Sophie was in church, and the servants, Barbe excepted, had all gone to hear the sermon. A deep, Sabbath-like stillness reigned in the house, a stillness which allowed her who had returned home to think over the impressions she had received on coming back.

She stood by the window and looked out upon the

snowy market-place. . . . It seemed as though the biting cold of winter did not exist without alone—the atmosphere in the house was likewise chilly and frosty, as if affected by invisible icicles. Formerly there had frequently been times when a dark spirit had wandered through the dear old home, when the melancholy of its master had exercised a depressing influence upon other minds. But it was merely the reflection of his dejection with which he invariably buried himself in the solitude of his chamber. All that could make the home cozy and pleasant had not been changed thereby. He had never interfered with the old-established domestic arrangements, had always given liberally and tried to preserve for his family and for those who served him the comforts of his home. . . . How changed was all this!

At this moment he, the successor, sat again in his chair behind his beloved "debit and credit," but the counting-house was not alone his theatre of action. He was everywhere. Like a shadow his tall form crept about the house, from attic to cellar, startling the servants by his sudden and noiseless appearance. Barbe complained that he followed upon her heels like a "policeman," that he called the women who sold butter and eggs to his office-window, and ask how much they had left in the kitchen, and then he went over himself and scolded about the "enormous" consumption; he would pull out pieces of wood from the fire, and had exchanged the large kitchen-lamp for a smaller one, which looked like a spark in the immense kitchen, and at which one had to strain one's old eyes until one was almost blind.

"Money saved is money earned!" was now the motto, and rubbing his cold, bloodless hands the young master at every opportunity said that now the world should again have the right to designate the Lamprechts as the

"Thuringian Fuggers"—with the last two heads of the house the reputation for wealth had been partly lost.

As yet not a complaining word had passed Aunt Sophie's lips, but she was very pale, the fresh, bright animation had disappeared from her dear, faithful face, and that morning at coffee she had said that the next spring she should have a couple of rooms and kitchen added to her summer house; to live amid the beauties of nature had always been her cherished wish.

Now she crossed the market-place. Service was over. In crowds the worshipers streamed down the street which led from the church to the "Anlage," the magnificent promenade on the east side of the market-place. There waved veils and plumes, velvets and silks swept the stones. Rich and poor, old and young, walked side by side, so certain of their life and existence—and perhaps the next Sunday many would not be there. Who hears the rustle of the Ruler over his head? Proud Frau Judith and beautiful Dore once took their way with as much certainty over the market-place, the same way now taken by Aunt Sophie in her new fur cloak.

The pupils, too, came along singing a choral. Margarete drew her fur jacket together across her breast and went out to greet her aunt at the door, and at the moment she opened it, the young throats without began in a touching manner the magnificent "The heavens declare the glory of the Lord."

"I ordered that extra for Sunday—usually only chorals are sung," said Aunt Sophie, entering and shaking the snow from her boots. But Margarete scarcely heard that she was speaking. She was standing listening breathlessly to the high soprano which soared seraphim-like, triumphant and silvery-clear above the other voices.

"Why, it is little Max from the warehouse," said her

aunt. "The little fellow has now, too, to sing for his bread."

Margarete stepped upon the threshold of the half-open door and looked out. There he stood, the black cap upon his curls, his blooming cheeks still more deeply tinged with color by the keen, wintry air, and with the tones which escaped the warm young breast his breath turned to steam before his lips.

As soon as the last tone had died away, Margarete beckoned to him, and he came over immediately and bowed like a little cavalier before the young lady. "Do your grandparents allow you to sing at doors in the cold?" she asked, in an almost angry tone, as she seized the boy's hand and drew him towards her on the threshold.

"You can be certain of that, Fraulein!" replied he, rather indignantly. "Grandmama allows it, and it suits grandpapa. Nor is it always so cold, though that is nothing—the fresh air is good for me."

"And how comes it that you have joined the pupils?"

"Do you not know that we boys earn a great deal of money by this?" He cast a hurried glance behind him in the direction taken by the last little straggler. "Let me go!" he urged, anxiously. "The prefect will scold!" He drew his cold little hand forcibly from the young lady's right, and he was gone.

"There have, too, been many changes in the warehouse?" asked Margarete, sorrowfully, with abated breath.

"Yes, indeed, my dear Grete, everything!" replied Reinhold, instead of his aunt. He was standing at his open office-window. "And you shall learn at once in what way things have been changed. But, first of all, be kind enough to close the doors, it comes in exceedingly cold. . . . The neighbors are probably rejoicing that Fraulein Lamprecht is imitating the last Frau Cotta of Eisenach by calling the carolers into the house—it is a pity you did not have a bowl of soup in your hand, too! That would have been more touching!"

Aunt Sophie closed the doors, and disappeared in silence.

"Aunt makes a face all the time now, as if she had swallowed vinegar," said Reinhold, shrugging his shoulders. "The new, sharp broom with which the house is being swept does not please her—of course it may not please the old folks to have fresh air blow through their warm, rotting nest; but that does not concern me, and still less will I do aunt the favor of allowing the old, lazy life to continue, and retain notoriously idle people in the business. Old Lenz was discharged five weeks ago, and has until the New Year to vacate the warehouse. . . . There, now you know, Grete, why the boy is singing before the doors. Other children have to do it, too—no pearl falls from their

crown, and I cannot see why the prince from the warehouse should be too good to do it."

He closed the window, and Margarete without a word of reply went into the courtyard-room. There she wrapped a shawl about her, thrust a small roll of money into her pocket, and immediately crossed the court to the warehouse.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE doors of the old house fell heavily behind the young lady, and she paused a moment at the foot of the steps motionless. She had descended those steps on that terrible day in order to go to Dambach and to obtain the dreadful certainty that she was an orphan. . . . If *he* could know how the minor now behaved! How mercilessly he put an end to everything which did not exactly agree with his calculations! . . . The deceased had been fond of little Max—she was frequently thereby reminded of Saul and David; the dark, melancholy man had not been able either to escape the charm which the handsome bright boy exercised over all. She remembered the soft tone in which he addressed the child as he assured his father-in-law that later on he should take the boy into his counting-house. And had he not too said, in the midst of the storm as they stood by the window, that the boy was not intended to amuse others? . . . And now the child sang at doors in the biting cold of winter!

She ascended the steps. The boards under her feet were snow-white, and a delicate perfume of juniper was wafted towards her—the real Thuringian Sunday fragrance!

To her light rap came no "enter," nor was her entrance noticed at once, although watchful Philine struck up in the kitchen immediately. In one of the deep window-recesses sat Frau Lenz, knitting a gay woolen jacket, and in the other stood her husband's work-table; he was bending low over his work. Only when the young lady uttered her loud friendly greeting did both of the old people look up and rise.

The couple's surprised, constrained manner suddenly confused Margarete. Her warm sense of sympathy had impelled her hither, but she came from the house where lived an inexorable enemy of these old people, an enemy who had taken the bread from their mouths and had driven them out into misery and care. Must they not feel bitter and suspicious towards all who came from there?

The old artist came to her assistance. He heartily extended his hand, and led her to the sofa. . . . There she now sat in the same corner where ten years before the weary, fever-stricken child had been tenderly laid and nursed. That night in all its detail arose before her, and she could not understand how her papa after such proofs of kindness and readiness to help his child could have maintained so haughty a manner towards the occupants of the warehouse. And how unfortunate the old people were now!

Yet want was not visible. The room was comfortably warmed; a large bright carpet covered the floor; neither furniture nor shades looked worn—it could be seen that during all those years money and care had been expended to make the home habitable. In the centre of the room stood the set dinner-table. The clean tablecloth gleamed like satin, the napkins were in fine rings, and beside the decorated china plates lay silver spoons.

"I have disturbed you at your work," said Margarete, apologetically, as she took the nearest chair, while Herr and Frau Lenz sat upon the sofa.

"It was not work, it was but to pass away the time," replied the old artist. "I have no longer any steady work, so I was painting on a landscape which I began years ago. To be sure it is slow. I am quite blind in one eye, and the other is, too, tolerably weak; so I have to depend only on the few bright noon hours."

"Have they taken your regular work from you?" asked Margarete, frankly proceeding toward her goal.

"Yes, my husband is discharged," replied Frau Lenz, bitterly. "Discharged like a day-laborer, because he, as a conscientious artist, did not turn out such a quantity of work like the young, careless smearers."

"Hannchen!" he interrupted, in a warning tone.

"Ah, dear Ernst, if I do not speak who will?" she replied, bitterly, and yet with a melancholy smile upon her sad face. "Am I in my old days to cease to be what I have been all my life, my all-too-good, modest husband's champion?"

He shook his gray head. "But we must not be unjust either, dear wife," said he, mildly. "During the past two years I have not turned out enough work, in accordance with my salary, on account of my eyes. I told them so, and asked to be paid by the piece, but the young master would not hear about it. Well, he has the right to decide, though he has not yet been declared of age, and the opening of the will is yet to come. . . . Upon this will many of the old workmen in Dambach, who are in a position similar to mine, are hoping."

Margarete knew from Aunt Sophie that a will made by

her father still existed, and was to be opened during the next few days; but it had only been cursorily mentioned; Aunt may have known nothing more. The young lady read this in the old man's peculiar, anxious glance. She had laid little stress upon this fact, but still less had the thought occurred to her that the deceased's last will and testament might render Reinhold's arbitrariness retrogressive.

'Heavens," cried she, eagerly, "if you think that the will can alter much——"

"It *will* and *must!*" interrupted Frau Lenz, with a strange, hard accent and emphasis.

Margarete maintained silence for a moment, looking in astonishment into the still beautiful blue eyes of the old lady—a sort of savage satisfaction gleamed in them. "Well then," she added emphatically, with reproach, "wherefore the cruelty of allowing the child to sing upon the street for his bread?"

Frau Lenz started up; she rose to her feet. She was lame and only moved with difficulty; but at this moment she seemed to experience no pain and weakness. "Cruel? We? To our child, our idol, our all?" she cried, as if beside herself.

The old man seized her hand soothingly. "Be calm, dear heart!" he admonished, smiling softly. "We have never been cruel, we two old folks, have we, Hannchen? Not towards the tiniest creature made, leaving out of the question our boy. . . . You have heard him sing?" He turned to Margarete.

"Yes, in front of our house, and my heart ached. It was so bitterly cold—I thought his breath would freeze. He will take cold."

Herr Lenz shook his head. "The little fellow has used himself to it. The room is too small for his voice, and

often before were are aware of it he is standing upstairs at the attic-window or in the open gallery singing out into the storm and snow."

At the last words he rose, put his arm around his wife, and gently pressed her into the corner of the sofa. "There—standing gives you pain, dearest. And you must not grieve your old man with the agitation which always harms you! . . . Yes, you see, Fraulein, such a heart is a wonder of loving-strength and capability," said he to the young lady, again taking his seat. "One thinks that it must have been exhausted by the self-sacrifice and denial for the children, and then come the grandchildren, and the grandmother is again the same lioness she was in her youth."

Margarete thought with bitterness of the old lady on the upper floor of the main-building, for whom children and childrens' children were only the steps by means of which she wanted to rise.

"You see, there against the warm stove stand the house-boots, and in the tunnel is hot beer for our little caroler," he continued. "And when he comes home, he always beams with delight; for, according to his opinion, he now has a great sphere of activity—he is caring for his grand-parents." The old man smiled, and as he did so he wiped a tear of emotion from under his spectacles.

"Yes, after the young master discharged me a few bad days followed for us," he began again. "We had paid Max's tailor and shoe bill, had laid in our supply of coal, when the sum upon which we had always been able to reckon promptly was suddenly taken away; then came a night upon which we stood before the empty cash-box, and did not know of what we should make our soup the next day. . . . I wanted to go and sell a couple of our silver spoons; but the little woman there"—he pointed to his

wife with a loving glance—"anticipated me. She took pieces of embroidery and knitting which in her leisure hours she had made with her skilful fingers, took them out of the drawer and went—difficult as it was for her to walk, too—to the shops with Max, and she brought back with her not only money, but many orders. . . . Now I, old fellow, allow myself to be supported by the hand on which I once put the wedding-ring, with the firm conviction that my wife would have the life of a princess by my side. Ah, you see, that is an artist's hopes and life!"

"Ernst!" interrupted Frau Lenz, threatening him with her finger. "Do you really wish to make Fraulein Lamprecht believe that I was one who dreamed of an Utopian life with you? . . . No, Fraulein, he is romancing, the old artistic brain! I never had a talent for idleness, I was always too quick for that. To work and to help was my element, and that vein Max has inherited from me. 'Grandmama,' said he on the way home, 'tomorrow I shall join the carolers. The choirmaster told me he could use a little boy with a voice like mine in his choir, and the boys get pocketfuls of money——'"

"We sought to dissuade him," interpolated Herr Lenz, "but he would not hear of it; he implored and wept and coaxed, and finally my wife gave in and allowed it——"

"But not for the sake of gain!" she interrupted, with almost violent protestation. "Do not think that, for God's sake! The few groschens lie untouched in the box; they shall be saved as a memento of the time when bitter necessity inspired the child with the thought of singing for bread before the house, which——"

"Hannchen!" warned the old man, with great gravity and emphasis.

She compressed her lips firmly, and with a strangely eloquent, glowing glance she looked out into the frosty air

through the window opposite. There lay a thirst for vengeance in her whole manner. "The child has been treated badly enough by that great, proud family since he has been on German soil," said she, angrily, with eyes still averted, and through her clinched teeth. "The gravel in the courtyard was too good for his feet, and the garden-table under the elms was desecrated by his books, his little hands as they wrote. Nor should he ever have been driven away from the coffin upstairs in the large hall——" She paused and raised her hand to her eyes.

"My brother is ill, and, therefore, he is nobody s friend; you must not judge him so severely; others, too, have to suffer under his seeming rudeness," comforted Margarete, gently. "On the other hand I know that my father was exceedingly fond of little Max, as are all in our house. I know that he intended to provide for his future, and for that reason have I come. . . . It would surely have grieved him as deeply as it did me to see the beautiful child standing without at the door, and, therefore, I should like to ask you to refuse the little songster the permission accorded him, and to afford me the pleasure——" With a deep blush she thrust her hand in her pocket.

"No, no alms!" exclaimed Frau Lenz, almost wildly, laying her hand upon the young lady's arm. "No alms!" she repeated more calmly, as Margarete drew her empty hand out of her pocket. "I feel that you mean well. From childhood you always had a noble, kindly heart. No one knows that better than I—no blame attaches to you! But let us maintain our bit of pride in having parried by our own strength the blow dealt us. . . . See"—she pointed to a large basket standing in the recess of the window, which was filled to the top with gay embroidery—"that is nothing but finished work! At present we shall not need to starve, and later on God will help us! . . .

Max shall not sing again upon the streets, I promise you that faithfully! He will certainly be grieved, but he must make the best of it!"

Margarete took the old lady's right hand in both of hers, and pressed it warmly. "I can understand you, and shall surely not again be so clumsy," said she, with a fleeting smile. "In return you will doubtless permit me to love the child as dearly as ever, and to keep an eye to his career."

"Who knows, Fraulein—circumstances often quite suddenly change the most fixed purposes—who knows what you may think about it in four weeks' time!" replied Frau Lenz, with emphasis.

"No differently from what she does today, I'll wager my old head on that!" cried her husband, enthusiastically. "I have watched little Grete as she played in the courtyard. It requires a strong sisterly affection and the capability of self-sacrifice to be again and again a spoilt, sickly brother's patient steed, and to allow oneself to be beaten and tormented without rebelling. I have further seen the dear little thing run to the kitchen and coax from scolding Barbe butter upon the pieces of bread for the beggar-children in the hall. . . . Were I to enumerate all the traits I have noticed of a kind, stout heart, I should never finish. And I know that her worldly life has not diminished the rich store—old Lenz found that out himself in the early days of her return."

During this Margarete had risen—she was quite red and embarrassed. "Then at least one pair of eyes have carefully judged the romp," said she, smiling. "But you should have seen the censure I received in those days, how often I was severely reprimanded for my frivolity! Of course that remained a secret of the main-building, and could not alter your good opinion. . . . Only in one point

do I give my right—I have a hard head, which the force of circumstances cannot change so easily in the course of four weeks."

She extended her hand in farewell to both of the old people, and, escorted by them to the stairs, she left the warehouse. She went away far more thoughtful than she had come thither. . . . What a blissful life that was in the old house behind her! The more severely fate attacked them, the more closely were they united.

Involuntarily her eyes scanned the upper floor of the main-building; there reigned another spirit—"respectability, good form, propriety," grandmama called it, while the old man who preferred a solitary life in the country to breathing the icy atmosphere which delighted his distinguished wife, called it "selfishness, coupled with the contemptible inclination to toady to those above her in rank." Was it strange that Herbert—but no, even in her thoughts she must not insult him by the opinion that he was heartless! . . . He was kind to her. He had written to her twice to Berlin, as anxiously as if he had been her guardian, and she had answered him. After that he met her at the last important station on her return, in the hope of making lighter her entrance into her lonely paternal halls. This grandmama had not known; she would not have approved of this kindness and condescension of the counsellor towards young Grete, for the reason that she had vexed her by refusing point-blank to become Baroness von Billingen. The old lady had written very angrily about it to her sister and Margarete. . . . What was Herbert's opinion of the shipwreck of these hopes had to this hour remained a mystery to the young girl. He had not mentioned the delicate matter in any of his letters, and she had been upon her guard likewise in not touching on the subject.

Engrossed with these digressive thoughts she returned to the "courtyard-room" and replaced the roll of money in the drawer of the desk—with another blush. She must and could not again show her interest in little Max in this way—it was closed to her. She felt herself to be powerless; to keep track of the circumstances and to know what was to be done in this case required a man. She determined to consult with Herbert about it.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO days had elapsed since then. The counsellor had not yet returned, and, therefore, was it so quiet on the usually so greatly frequented staircase and upper floor. Every morning Margarete went dutifully upstairs to bid her grandmama good-day. It was always a disagreeable duty, for the old lady was still very angry. To be sure she did not scold aloud—God forbid, no passion must be exhibited! Politeness has more delicate and certain weapons—the keenness of a knife in glance and voice, and the sharpness of a dagger and needle on the tongue. But this manner of attack rendered her granddaughter doubly indignant, and it frequently required all her self-control to bear this in silence. . . . Generally ungraciously dismissed, she descended the stairs with a sense of relief to enter the hall for a moment. An uncomfortable chilliness pervaded the spacious hall, and papa's private rooms were closed; not one of the cozy apartments in which he had lived and breathed, not the tiniest object to which his hand had touched was accessible to her; she had to be contented with the spot upon which she had for the last time seen him sleeping peacefully, with a radiance upon the brow so overshadowed in life. But in this spot she was always possessed by the melancholy though comforting feeling that he was near her. Below every effort was being made to eradicate as rapidly as possible the traces of his existence and influence.

That morning on leaving the hall Margarete had met someone. She quickly stepped over the threshold and suddenly found herself face to face with handsome Heloise,

who was just crossing it. Baroness Taubeneck had panted up the turning in the stairs several paces ahead of the young lady; occupied with the effort of mounting she had not seen the person who stepped out of the hall; on the other hand, her daughter bowed very pleasantly—yes, her eyes even glided over the girlish form clad in deep mourning with an unmistakable expression of sympathy, which Margarete could not help noticing; and yet she was tempted to ignore the courteous greeting, and, without returning it, to fly back to the hall. . . . She cherished a rooted aversion for the lovely Heloise, wherefore she scarcely knew herself. . . . Seen near by, the duke's niece was indeed most beautiful; the velvety skin, the magnificent coloring, and the large, brilliant blue eyes were indeed dazzling. Grandpapa was right when he said his granddaughter, the little brown May-chafer, would have to creep into the background before such charms. Even her phlegmatic composure in passing might be taken for proud dignity and refinement. "What, envy Grete?" the young girl had asked herself in this moment of rising anger and

disgust. No, it was not envy! She had always enjoyed looking upon a pretty maiden's face—it was certainly not envy! But possibly it might be the natural bitterness of plebeian blood against the antagonist of the commoners—yes, that was the reason! When her grandmama upstairs came to meet her guests with effusive expressions of delight, the young girl put her hands to her ears and flew down the stairs.

Below at the door stood their sleigh, a magnificent shell with costly fur-robes, and when later on the ladies re-entered it, lovely Heloise, with her white veil and waving golden hair, looked like a fairy flying over the snow. Oh, alas, how absurd must that cowering "bundle of rags" have looked in the sleigh recently, how cold and helpless beside Herbert's striking figure!

That entire day she could not shake off bitter, obtrusive thoughts and sensations; and, in addition, all the rooms were dark. The sky was shaking a thick mantle of snow indefatigably over the small town, and only occasionally did a gust of wind blow penetratingly through the masses of snow, which, like a silvery curtain, hid all view of the lanes and streets. . . . Only at night when the lamp was burning upon the table did the sitting-room grow cozier and Margarete's soul more composed. Notwithstanding the snow-storm, Aunt Sophie had gone out to give several orders which could not be deferred, and Reinhold was working in his study; he usually only came over when he was summoned to meals.

Margarete was arranging the tea-table. In the stove the wood blazed, casting a broad, pleasant light through the opening of the brass-doors upon the floor, and from the sill of the undraped window, against which the snowflakes helplessly fluttered to melt upon the warm panes, came doubly sweet the fragrance of Aunt Sophie's nurslings—

whole armies of violets and mayflowers. . . . No, just to spite the horrible day the evening should be pleasanter. Barbe brought in neatly-garnished cold dishes, and Margarete lighted the spirit-lamp under the tea-machine; and when Reinhold sent word to have him a sandwich brought in—he could not come over—his sister's heart grew light for the first time.

Without several carriages drove past, and it seemed as if one of them stopped at the house. Had the counsellor come back? Well, that would be heard tomorrow—surely no earlier! Margarete continued spreading ham on Reinhold's bread, nor did she look up when a slight sound at the door fell upon her ear. Probably Barbe was bringing something more in for the table; but such cold air as now fanned her cheek did not come from the warm kitchen; involuntarily she looked up, and saw the counsellor standing at the door. She started, and the fork with the ham fell from her hand.

He laughed softly and advanced to the table. He still wore his furs, and the snowflakes glistened upon his cap, so he must have come directly from out of doors.

"How startled you were, Margarete!" said he, shaking his head. "You were, probably, notwithstanding your housewifely occupation, in sunny Greece, and Hans Ruprecht in his furs recalled you to rude Thuringian reality? . . . Well, good evening," he added, with Thuringian heartiness offering her his hand—and it seemed to her that it must be pleasure which beamed upon her from the eyes beneath the fur-cap.

"No, I was not in Greece," she replied, her momentary agitation still trembling in her voice. "In spite of snow and ice I prefer being here at Christmas time. But it is something unusual for me to see you enter our sitting-room. You must know yourself that this room has

always been out of your way. Formerly the childrens' noise may have frightened you, and later on"—the sorrowful expression which since her father's death had hovered about her lips for the moment gave place to a roguish smile—"later on the pronounced Philistinism in the life and surroundings down here."

He drew a small package from his coat-pocket, and laid it upon the table. "That is why I came in, that and that alone!" said he, likewise with a smile. "Why should I carry up two flights of stairs a whole pound of tea, which I obtained for Aunt Sophie at the capital?" He now took off his fur-cap and brushed off the last sparkling remains of the snow. "However, you are mistaken in your supposition—I think it very cozy here, and your tea-table looks anything but Philistinic."

"May I offer you a cup of tea? It is just brewed!"

"Certainly! It will do me good after my cold ride. But then you must, too, allow me to lay off my furs." He tried to pull off the heavy coat. Involuntarily Margarete raised her arms in order to help him as she was in the habit of helping Uncle Theobald; but he drew back, and

a flash of anger gleamed in his eyes. "Don" do that!" he cried, almost roughly. "Uncle Theobald may need your filial aid—I do not yet!"

Impatiently, with one last mighty tug, he tore off the fur garment, and flung it upon the nearest chair.

"So, now I need help—I am pining for your hot tea!" said he, allowing his elegant form to glide into the sofa-corner. His brow was again serene, and he stroked his beard." But I am hungry as well, dear little housewife, and such an appetizing sandwich as you were just preparing before my eyes would taste better to me than the sandwiches upstairs which my mother has the cook prepare. Some day, in my own house, I shall expect my wife herself to prepare such morsels for me, if she does not want me to leave the table hungry."

Margarete handed him the tea ; but she did not speak, nor did she look at him. She wondered if proud Heloise would really waive etiquette and spread sandwiches for her husband with her dainty white hands? And Herbert himself—did he seriously entertain such ideas, grandmama's son, the man of fashion who so impressed society.

"You are very quiet, Margarete," thus did he break the silence ; "but I saw a mocking tremor in the corners of your mouth, and that speaks more plainly than words. You are secretly scoffing at my domestic life as I desire it, and think my wish may not be realized. Ah, you see, I can read your face like a book—you need not blush like a peony—I know more about the workings of your mind than you think."

Now she looked up hurt and impatient. "Do you really, too, send out gendarmes to spy out thoughts, uncle?"

"Yes, my dear niece, with your kind permission I do so, and that you must make the best of," he replied, laughing

softly. "All antagonistic thoughts interest me, and especially those to which the brain itself yields space unwillingly, against which it struggles like the colt against its chartered master, and which finally are victorious because a strong impulse is behind them."

He raised his cup to his lips, and as he did so attentively watched the dainty, girlish fingers dexterously preparing the wished-for sandwich.

"A glance into this sitting-room at this moment must be exceedingly pleasant," he began, after a moment's pause, with a look toward the window, whose shades were not drawn. "Over there"—he inclined his head in the direction of the houses on the other side of the market-place—"we might easily be taken for a young married couple."

Margarete blushed deeply. "Oh, no, uncle, the whole town knows——"

"That we are uncle and niece—quite right, my dear niece," he interrupted, sarcastically, again taking up his cup.

Margarete did not contradict him, but she had intended saying: "The whole town knows that you are betrothed?" . . . Well, let him think what he liked! He teased her in an almost insulting manner, and humor, which she had never until now noticed, was evident in his every word. He was apparently very gay, and probably had brought with him from the capital some very blissful thoughts. But she was not in the mood to rejoice with him; she was extremely depressed without knowing wherefore, and as when out of sorts one unconsciously brings up a topic distasteful to oneself and others, simply to change the subject she said, handing him the prepared sandwich: "Grandmama, had callers this morning—the ladies from Prince's Court were here."

He sat up, and unmistakable anxiety was depicted upon his face. "Did you speak to them?"

"No," she replied, coldly. "I only met the young lady by chance on the stairs. You know best that she cannot deign to address me, since I have not yet been presented at Prince's Court."

"Ah, yes, I forgot! Well, you will arrange that probably in the next few days."

She made no reply.

"I hope you will do that for my sake, Margarete."

She now looked at him; it was an angry glance which she cast upon him. "If I make the sacrifice of allowing myself to be dragged into this farce in deep mourning, and in my present mood, I shall do so solely to put an end to grandmama's importunities and torturing," she replied, harshly. She seated herself upon the nearest chair, and crossed her hands upon the table.

A scarcely perceptible smile played about his mouth.

"You are forgetting your *role* of housewife," said he, calmly, pointing to her idle hands. "Hospitality requires that you keep me company, and take a cup of tea likewise——"

"I must wait for Aunt Sophie."

"Well, as you like! The tea is excellent, and will taste good to me in spite of all this. But I should like to ask you, what has the young lady at Prince's Court done to you that you are always so bitter when she is mentioned?"

A brilliant flush overspread her cheeks. "She—to me?" cried she, as if terrified, as if discovered with some wicked thought. "She has not done the least thing to me!" How could she, for up to this time I have scarcely been near her!" She shrugged her shoulders. "But I instinctively feel that the merchant's daughter has that in store for her——"

"You are mistaken. She is good-natured——"

"Perhaps because she is phlegmatic—possibly she does not like to excite herself. Her beautiful face——"

"Yes, she is beautiful, of an incomparable beauty even," he agreed. "And I should like to know if there was not visible upon her face this morning something like secret happiness—she had great news yesterday?"

Ah, therefore was he so gay, so full of humor; the "great news" concerned him and her together. "You ask me that!" she exclaimed, with a bitter smile. "You should know best that the ladies from the Court are much too well-schooled to allow every looker-on to know their moods. I could see no trace of 'secret bliss;' I only noticed her classical profile, the blooming colors, her magnificent teeth as she smiled graciously and almost suffocated me in the violet perfume with which she filled the stairs, and *that* this extravagance was *not* refined in the aristocrat——"

"See, there was again the bitter trace!"

"I cannot bear her!" she suddenly burst forth.

He laughed, and stroked his beard in amusement. "That was good, honest German!" said he. "Do you know, of late I have frequently thought of the tiny maiden who in former days almost drove her grandmama to the verge of despair with her rude candor and her love of truth? . . . Life in the world without has not changed this candor to the most charming, graceful malice, and I was thinking that the substance of individuality had changed. But there it is, pure and untouched! I am delighted with the meeting, and can recall the time when the wrangler was publicly branded in the market-place as a rogue because he had taken a flower."

At his first words she rose and went towards the stove. Unnecessarily she put one piece of wood after the other in

the bright, dancing flames, which lighted up her darkly contracted brow, visibly agitated features—she was angry with herself. What she had said was, to be sure, the strictest truth, but with it was a lack of tact for which she should have to blush until her life should end.

She stood by the stove and forced herself to smile. "You will believe me that I have not now such thoughts," she replied from her post. "'Life in the world' hardens the soul against too much delicate perception. In the society of the present so many thoughts are stolen one takes as much as is possible of the good name of one's beloved neighbor, of his honorable aspirations, the justness of his thoughts, and would like best to cause to disappear from the scene the entire personality, as once the rose was thrust into your pocket. One can best watch in the house of a man of repute this struggle for existence—or, rather, this thieving from selfishness and envy. I have remarked a great deal of it, and have paid for this wisdom with a good share of my childish, *naive* views. Consequently, you might put all of lovely Blanka's roses now in your pocket—before my eyes——"

"They would now surely be protected from my marauding hand——"

"Well, then, for my part you might take every rose at Prince's Court!" she interrupted, with agitation.

"Oh, that would be too much for the herbarium in my portfolio, do you not think so, Margarete?" He laughed softly to himself, and leaned back still more comfortably in his sofa-corner. "Nor do I need to creep in there like a thief. The ladies share with my mother and me the flowers and fruit which grow on their estate, and when you pay your visit you too will be allowed to take away a bouquet out of the conservatory."

"Thank you, I do not care for artificially-grown

flowers," said she, coldly, walking toward the room door in order to open it. Aunt Sophie had returned, and was stamping and shaking the snow from her shoes and clothes without. She looked surprised when Herbert's tall form arose from the sofa-corner and he greeted her. "What, a guest at our tea-table?" cried she, delighted, while Margarete took off her cloak and hood.

"Yes, but a badly treated one, Aunt Sophie!" said he. "The hostess finally retired to the chimney-corner and let me drink my tea alone."

Aunt Sophie's eyes twinkled merrily. "Then there was an examination, as in days gone by? Gretel cannot stand that. And if you have wandered into Mecklenburg, to learn——"

"Not at all," he answered, with sudden gravity, with evident surprise. "I thought that was all settled?" he added.

"Heaven forbid! Not by a long way, as Gretel finds out every day!" replied her aunt, frowning at the thought of the Frau Amtsratin's importunities.

The counsellor's eyes sought Margarete's, which she averted. She avoided participation by so much as a word in this distasteful subject which her aunt had in a thoughtless manner touched upon. But let him dare to unite forces with grandmama, and urge her to change her mind—just let him dare! In silence she stepped behind the urn to fill her aunt's cup; but Herbert did not again turn to the table. He delivered over to Aunt Sophie the tea he had brought her, and politely exchanged several words with her; then he took his fur-coat on his arm and extended his right hand to Margarete. She touched it with her fingertips.

"No 'good-night?'" he asked. "Are you so vexed because I complained of you to Aunt Sophie?"

"It was your privilege, uncle—I was rude. I am not vexed, I am only irritated."

"By windmills, Margarete?" he asked, looking with a smile into her uplifted angry eyes; then he left the room.

"It is strange how the man has changed!" said Aunt Sophie, looking with a sly smile over her cup into the pale, girlish face, which, turned towards the window, was staring moodily at the snow-storm without. "He has always been kind and exceedingly polite to me, I cannot say anything else; but he was and remained to me a stranger on account of his reserved manner. . . . Now, however, I feel very often—strangely, too—as if I had had him to rear as well as you others. He is so sincere, so confiding—and his taking tea here this evening——"

"I will explain that to you, aunt!" the young girl coldly interrupted. "There are times when one would like to embrace the whole world, and in such a mood has he returned from the capital, from the court. He has, as he himself expressed it, brought with him 'delightful news.' We may accordingly look shortly for the announcement of his betrothal."

"It may be!" said Aunt Sophie, drinking the last of her tea.

CHAPTER XX.

THE next morning Margarete stood at the open window of the courtyard-room. She was brushing the snow from the stone sill and scattering bread crumbs and corn for the hungry birds. Above the large court quadrangle stretched a clear, blue, frosty sky , it had not retained the tiniest flake, and although occasionally a shower of silver fell, it was shaken from the weary elm-boughs, which scattered a portion of their heavy load of snow upon the ground. . . . It was very cold. Not a dove ventured forth from its cote, and the birds, for whom a feeding-place had been prepared, preferred to starve in their nests—not the flutter of a wing broke the deep silence of the courtyard.

Chilled through Margarete was about to close the window, when the door of the stable opposite was opened, and the counsellor rode over the threshold upon his beautiful bay. He bowed to her, and rodé directly under the window.

"Are you going to ride to see grandpapa at Dambach?" she asked.

"First of all to Prince's Court," he replied, smoothing his new gloves. "Perhaps I may succeed better than you in reading in the young lady's features what I want to know—what do you think about it, Margarete?"

"I think you know already, and have certainly no need to consult the oracle," said she, abruptly. "But whether the lady will receive you so early is doubtful. She looks too well-cared-for for one to believe in her rising early."

"There you are very much mistaken again. I'll wager

she is at this moment in the stable with her Lady Milford, seeing that she is cared for. She is passionately fond of riding—have you never seen her in the saddle?"

She shook her head and flung it back.

"Well, she rides superbly, and is much admired. Indeed, she looks like a Valkyrie when she rides along upon her fine steed. This Lady Milford is, moreover, no English full-blood, but rather a genuine Mecklenburger, beautifully built and gentle—you perhaps know the breed——"

"Certainly, uncle. Herr von Billingen has two magnificent Mecklenburg carriage-horses." With this name she defiantly threw down the gauntlet. Let him unite with her grandmama; she preferred that to being compelled to listen to the inexhaustible praises of a person whom she hated. She was prepared, she felt glowing within her a veritable longing for the strife.

He leaned forward and patted the neck of his bay, which had grown restless. "Of course an elegant equipage goes with these magnificent horses?" he asked, tranquilly.

"Surely—a very handsome one, a carriage admired even in Berlin. It is very comfortable with its silver-gray satin upholstering. Herr von Billingen often took Aunt Elise and me out——"

"An aristocratic, stately coachman——"

"Oh, yes, stately of course, as I have already said. Tall and broad, and pink and white like an apple-blossom! Quite the North German type, as, for example, is the young lady at Prince's Court."

He cast a hasty glance at the defiantly curved lips, her glowing cheeks, and smiled. "Come, close the window, Margarete! You will take cold," said he. "Such things are better fitted for the cozy tea-table chat." He bowed and rode away, while she hurriedly closed the window.

Sinking into the nearest chair, she hid her face in her crossed arms, which rested on the windowsill. She could have wept with vexation and bitterness at herself—she always allowed his smiling composure to get the best of her.

Towards noon Herbert returned, and soon after grandmama came downstairs to announce with great solemnity that the ladies from Prince's Court requested herself and her granddaughter to call upon them that afternoon.

At three o'clock the sleigh again flew over the snowy ground. This time the grandmama, arrayed in velvet and silk, sat by the side of the young girl erect and expectant.

Herbert drove. He sat behind the ladies, and when he leaned forward Margarete could feel his breath upon her cheek. Today she did not need his fur-coat; she had bought herself a warm fur-wrap, and she fancied on entering the carriage that he had glanced sarcastically at this new acquisition.

The tiny rococo castle came in sight. With its large, sunlit windows it lay in the midst of the snowy surroundings like a gem upon a white velvet cushion. . . . The factory chimneys at Dambach puffed out great columns of black smoke, which rose and in broad streaks obscured the

clear blue sky; but it did not reach the pure air of Prince's Court. The Frau Amtsratin remarked upon this to her son with evident satisfaction.

"At present the wind is from the west," said he. "The north wind does not deal so gently; it often blows the smoke into the windows; the ladies complain of it."

"Heavens, cannot something be done to prevent it?" cried the old lady, quite indignantly.

"I know of none, except that when the wind is in that direction simply to extinguish the fire——"

"And then part of the workmen might take a walk and have nothing to eat," interpolated Margarete, bitterly.

Grandmama turned and looked into her face. "What a tone! . . . You are nicely prepared for your introduction into a noble house! I must beg of you not to disgrace yourself and us by those liberal remarks, which unfortunately I know you are given to making! Liberalism is no longer the fashion—God be thanked! In the circles in which I have the good-fortune to move it never gained any foothold, and if occasionally one of our set was possessed by the fancy for freedom and humanity, he has been fully cured of it, and—wants to know nothing about it."

At this moment Herbert touched the horses' backs with the whip, and the sleigh glided at redoubled speed over the smooth road, to halt in scarcely more than a minute at the principal entrance to Prince's Court.

"Ah, yes, we lead a very secluded life here!" said the hostess, in reply to a remark to that effect made by the Frau Amtsratin, and with a deep sigh looking out over the quiet, snowy landscape. The introduction was over, and the party had entered the drawing-room.

In the fire-place of the different rooms the burning logs crackled; it was warm and comfortable in the midst of the ancient splendor. The furniture of Prince's Court had not

been changed for centuries, but remained the same to shelter either a younger prince or a prince's widow, as the case might be. Elegant furniture of the period of Louis XIV filled the rooms, and the various pieces inlaid with silver, bronze and tortoise-shell gleamed and shone on this day as they had more than a hundred years before. Only the draperies and covers for the furniture seemed to have been changed for the present occupants; they were fresh and tasteful, but extremely simple.

"Since my sixteenth year I have lived in the great world," continued the stout lady, "and am not qualified for a hermit's existence. I should pine away here did I not know that some day deliverance would come." She cast a smiling, meaning glance at the counsellor, and he bowed his head in assent. Little Frau Amtsratin's form grew considerably at this glance. She turned in delight to the side where sat the lovely Heloise.

The young lady leaned back in her arm-chair, richly attired and as haughtily nonchalant as a princess. She had addressed a few agreeable words to Margarete, and then lapsed into silence. But indeed on this day there was more expression in her features, and it heightened her beauty wonderfully. At quite a distance, but in a straight line behind her on the wall, hung the oil-painting of a lady, a knee-piece. She was dressed in black velvet; luxuriant, fair hair peeped from beneath a hat with a long white plume, and her left hand rested upon the head of a grey-hound standing beside her.

The resemblance between her and the lovely Heloise was a striking one, and the Frau Amtsrarin spoke of it with an admiring glance.

"Yes, the resemblance is great and easily comprehensible—it is the portrait of my sister Adele," said Baroness Taubeneck. "She married Count Sorma, and, to my

extreme sorrow, died two years ago. And now only think, my brother-in-law, a man of sixty, has played us a trick and married his steward's daughter! I am beside myself!"

"I can understand that," said the Frau Amtsratin, quite indignantly. "It is hard, it is really depressing to be obliged to admit such an element into a family. But in my opinion these modern marriages in such favor with the noblemen of the present day, marriages with actresses, are still more dreadful. When I think that a princess of the stage, perhaps even a ballet-girl, who a few days before was applauded by the men, and who appeared in short skirts which were shameless, should suddenly be put as mistress into an ancient family, I shudder, every drop of blood in my body boils within me!"

The counsellor cleared his throat, and the lady of the house seized her *vinaigrette*, inhaling its contents as eagerly as if she were indisposed.

At this moment a servant entered and handed Fraulein von Taubeneck a letter upon a silver salver. She took the letter with unusual haste, and retired to the adjoining room; after the lapse of a few moments she called the counsellor to join her.

Margarete was seated exactly opposite the corner mantel-piece in the drawing-room. The immense mirror above this mantel-piece reflected a part of the drawing-room with all its glittering appointments, but it reflected as well a window-recess of the adjoining room, a cozy nook filled with flowers and draped with mull curtains.

In this recess stood Heloise, who handed the counsellor the open letter as he entered. He glanced at the contents, and drew nearer the young lady. They conversed in a low voice, and in the midst of the conversation lovely Heloise leaned to one side suddenly, broke from its stem a full-

blown red camelia, and fastened it, with a speaking smile, in Herbert's buttonhole.

"My God, how pale you are, Fraulein!" exclaimed the baroness at this moment, seizing Margarete's hand. "Are you ill?"

With a start the young girl shook her head, and the blood rushed to her cheeks. She was as well as usual, she assured the baroness; the pallor was probably the after-result of the cold ride. Now, too, Fraulein von Taubeneck re-entered in Herbert's company.

The baroness with a smile shook her finger menacingly at the counsellor. "How, you have been robbing my finest camelia-bush? Do you not know that I attend to it with my own hands, that every bud is counted?"

Heloise laughed. "I am the culprit, mama! *I* decorated him! And have I not every reason to?"

Her mama nodded her head in assent, and took a cup of coffee from the salver which a servant was handing around. The camelias now became the topic of conversation. The baroness was a passionate lover of flowers, and the

duke had therefore had a small winter-garden made for her.

"You must see it after awhile, Fraulein," said she to Margarete. "Grandmama has already seen it; she will remain with me, and we will chat a little while the counsellor escorts you."

Herbert hurriedly put himself at her service. He scarcely gave Margarete time to drink a cup of coffee, for he thought it would soon be dark. The young girl rose, and as Heloise's silken-attired form sank upon the chair at the open piano, and she began to play a prelude in rather an awkward manner, the couple left the drawing-room.

They passed through a tolerably long suite of rooms, and from all the walls looked down upon them members of the ducal house, in embroidered court-dress or with mail-clad breasts—a bright-eyed race, with white skins and blooming cheeks and a deep reddish-gold on their enormous mustaches or dainty Henri Quatre.

"With your long train you sweep along as noiselessly as do these red-bearded ancestry through the old interesting little prinzenschloss up there," said Herbert to his silent companion.

"They would not acknowledge me," she replied, with a keen glance at the pictures; "I am too dark."

"To be sure, you are not a German, Gretchen!" said he, smiling. "You might easily have been the model for Gustave Richter's Italian boy."

"We have some Italian blood in our veins—two Lamprechts took unto themselves wives from Rome and Naples. Do you not know that, uncle?"

"No, dear niece, I do not know that; I am not posted in the family chronicles. But judging from certain characteristics of their progeny, these women must at least

have been doges' daughters or princesses from Italian palaces."

"It is a pity that I shall have to dispel this illusion, uncle! It accords so well with your and grandmama's wishes, and, too, in the presence of all them proud noblemen"—she pointed to the pictures—"the information will be unwelcome; but the fact remains that one of the women was a fisherman's child, and the other a stone-mason's daughter."

"Ah, how interesting! Then those old, straight-laced merchants had, too, their romantic fits. . . . But, what has the past of the house of Lamprecht to do with *me?*"

A sort of pained affright passed over the young girl's face. "Nothing, you have nothing at all to do with it!" she replied, hastily. "You are free to even ignore the relationship. It would please *me* only too well, for I should not have to fear interference from you, as I have to suffer it daily from grandmama."

"She annoys you?"

She made no answer for a moment. To complain behind the back of another had never been her habit, and in this case she was talking to the son of his mother. But the words had escaped her, and could not be recalled.

"Well, I too was disobedient and did not fulfil her cherished wish," said she, while Heloise turned from her prelude to a modern piece of music. "This bitter disappointment grieves her—I am sorry, and I excuse her vexation at me as much as I can. But it is incomprehensible to me how in spite of all this she can still hope to make me change my determination, to render it null and void. I cannot understand the passionate desire to be closely related to the exclusive set; and does it not, too, surprise you that grandmama could coincide with the baroness against the intruder, her brother-in-law's future

wife? How am *I* any different from this steward's daughter?"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Herr von Billingen is a count, and the Lamprechts enjoy the respect of an ancient patrician family, my mother may think, therefore her conduct is not so 'surprising.' You are less comprehensible to me. . . . Wherefore that bitter anger against those privileges of birth, which so often are displayed in such an embittered manner?"

At these last words they entered the winter-garden, but neither the magnificent coloring of the blooming plants, nor the fragrance wafted towards her seemed obvious to Margarete. With evident agitation she paused near the entrance.

"You misjudge me, uncle," said she. "I am not angry with the exclusive ones—I know too little about them. I only know that from time immemorial great rights and privileges have been connected with their names, and that before their citadel stands an angel with a fiery sword. How should that render me hostile? The world is wide, and one can go one's way without being annoyed by arrogance and pride of birth. So in that the reproach of bitterness does not apply to me; but I am indeed vexed with those who are my equals, and of whom an unlimited number are as happy as I am, and who can look back upon a large list of virtues in their family. They are as 'well-born' as the others; they too have ancestors, many of whom in brave defence of their possessions laid low the highborn thieves."

He laughed. "And, notwithstanding, your painted collection of ancestors shows none armed?"

"Why should they be?" she replied, gravely. "In their lives and aims each was a thorough man, as the standing of our house, its reputation with its con-

temporaries prove. Were outward signs needed? Had it always remained so, the commoners would too have their respected citadel. But posterity prefers to cringe, even to carry stones in a servile manner, stones which the others need to rebuild old, decayed barriers and bases. Genius, wealth, great talents, as soon as they show themselves in our class, are attracted to that sphere as by a magnet, and help to give strength and position to it, while those who are 'elevated' ungratefully scorn the honored name of their forefathers in order to be treated in their new station with contempt and abhorrence by those born in it."

He had grown very grave. "Strange maiden! How deep is your animosity towards things which for other young girls of your age scarcely exist!" said he, shaking his head. "And how severe does the judgment sound in your mouth! A short while since you could hide this harsh, severe view beneath smiling irony and grace."

"Since my father's death I have forgotten how to laugh and jest," she replied, with quivering lips and tearful eyes. "I know that prejudice and false illusions blinded him and clouded his life, though I do not know the real cause of his agony of mind. Enough of that! I ask but one thing of you, uncle: Now that you have found out how in earnest I am, will you not try to induce grandmama not to importune me any longer—it will avail her naught?"

"If you loved the man your rigid principles would yield, he would remain the victor!"

"No! A thousand times no!"

"Margarete!" He suddenly advanced and seized both of her hands. "I say 'if you loved him.' Can you really not realize that one, in order to become the blessing of another human being's life, must conquer oneself entirely,

HE SUDDENLY ADVANCED AND SEIZED BOTH OF HER HANDS. (P. 269.)

and yield up oneself, one's antipathies, one's dearest longings?"

She compressed her lips and shook her head.

"Do you mean to say that you have no knowledge of the nature of love?" He pressed her hands, which she sought to withdraw from his clasp, more tightly.

Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, she did not look up. "*Must* that be?" she murmured, with pallid lips. "Is such knowledge necessary to every mortal, can one not go through life without yielding a place to that demoniacal power?" Suddenly she stood erect, and with a violent effort freed her hands. "I want nothing to do with it," cried she, a wild light gleaming in her eyes. "Peace of mind do I require, and not that deadly struggle!" For a moment she paused in affright, as if she had caught herself in an act of indiscretion. "Moreover, I should not yield," she added, with more composure. "My best assistant would be my head—I hope it is clear and strong enough for that."

"Do you think so? Well, try it and suffer, until——" He ceased, and she looked up at him timidly—she had never seen his face so agitated; but he had wonderful control over himself. After once more walking through the winter-garden, he again approached her.

"We must return to the drawing-room," said he, quite calmly. "You would be embarrassed were you to be asked for your opinion over there, for you have seen nothing. So, examine this magnificent species of palm and that Canary dracæna. And look, above the bed of tulips and hyacinths the Spanish lilac is blooming—a charming spring picture! Have you looked around somewhat?"

"Yes, uncle!"

"Yes, uncle!" he repeated, mockingly. "The title

flows glibly from your lips again today; do you see in me here an especially venerable, respect-inspiring figure?"

"Not any more here than at home."

"Always then the title of uncle will follow me like the man's wig which always 'hung behind him.' Well, I will bear it until perhaps some day you will think of my name."

Soon after this the three personages were again seated in the sleigh; but they did not drive back to the town. The counsellor took the field-path, which cut through the fields sideways, and led direct to Dambach. His father had that morning complained of rheumatism in his shoulder, and he wanted to see how he was, said Herbert, urging on the horses.

The Frau Amtsratin leaned back in her corner crossly. The trip was certainly not to her taste, but she dared not protest openly. Instead she criticised very severely Margarete's silence—she had sat between the ladies like a bumpkin, whose every word had to be coaxed from her, and who could not count "three."

"Silence, too, is very good when with persons whose antecedents are not familiar to one, dear mama," whispered the counsellor, close to her ear. "I would too have been better pleased today had you not talked so freely about the *danseuses*—Baroness Taubeneck was one herself!"

"Almighty Father!" With this exclamation the Frau Amtsratin sank back as though crushed. "No, no, that is a mistake, Herbert, a groundless, malicious slander!" she said, after a short pause. "Everyone knows that Prince Ludwig's wife was of noble birth——"

"Certainly. But for some years the family was in straitened circumstances. The last of the name were government sub-officials, and the two beautiful sisters, Baroness Taubeneck as well as the late Countess Sorma, earned their bread as *danseuses* under assumed names!"

"And you tell me this now?"

"I have only known it myself for a short time!"

The Frau Amtsratin did not utter another word. A few moments later the sleigh stopped in the courtyard of the Dambach factory. Night had already fallen, and lights from the long rows of work-room windows fell upon the snowy surface of the courtyard.

With a deep sigh the old lady with a shudder drew her furs closely about her, and on her son's arm tripped along the snow-covered garden-path. At the turn of the path by the frozen pond they saw the Amtsrat standing at the open window of his room. The lamp burned upon the table behind him; he wore his dressing-gown and was knocking the ashes out of his pipe upon the windowsill.

"Did you ever see such a man!" scolded the Frau Amtsratin, in a low voice. "He declares he is rheumatic and there he stands at the open window in this dreadful cold!"

"Ah, he is in the habit of doing it, mama—we cannot alter it," laughed the counsellor, leading her to the door of the villa.

"Ha, what an unexpected visit!" exclaimed the old gentleman, turning from the open window, when his wife crossed the threshold. "Zounds, Franziska, is it you, indeed? In the dark and cold? Something must be the matter!" He hurriedly closed the window, through which an icy breeze was blowing. "Shall I have coffee made?"

The little old lady shook her head. "Coffee? At this hour? Do not be offended, Heinrich, but you are becoming very countrified in your Dambach! It is almost tea-time! . . . We have come from Prince's Court——"

"I thought so! That is what was the matter!"

"And we did not want to return to town without inquiring how you were."

"Thanks for your kind inquiry. Well, I have many a twinge in my left shoulder, and sometimes the pain is a little too severe—that is so. I have whistled a bit with it today in order at least to keep time to the story."

"Shall we not send the doctor out, father?" asked Herbert, anxiously.

"No, indeed, my son! In this old machine"—he pointed to his broad breast—"there has never in my life been put one drop of the doctor's poison, so in my old age I shall certainly not pollute my blood! The foreman's wife rubbed me with spirits, and has put on a tow-bandage; she said it would do me good——"

"Yes, especially if you stand at the open window as you just did!" said the Frau Amtsratin, satirically, passing her muff through the tobacco-smoke, which was very noticeable now that the window was closed. "I know you will not have a physician; but you should at least try some home-remedy."

"Perhaps a cup of camomile tea, Franzchen?"

"No, elm-blossoms with lemon-juice would be more practical; that always helps me—you must perspire, Heinrich!"

"Brr!" he shivered. "I would prefer being in the lower regions! Do you see, you little May-chafer"—he twined his arm around the shoulder of Margarete, who some time before had laid aside her hat and coat and was standing by his side—"your old grandfather is to be abused thus! To the hospital with him if he is really to drink elm-blossom tea—do you not think so?"

She smiled and clung to him more closely. "In such things I am as inexperienced as a child, grandpapa; you cannot appeal to my judgment. But you must allow me to remain with you. You must not be alone with your suffering at night. I can fill your pipes, read aloud and talk until you are sleepy."

"Will you do this, little mouse?" cried he, with delight. "Ah, yes, I should like that. But tomorrow the will will be opened, and you cannot be absent."

"I shall ask uncle to send the sleigh for me——"

"And your careful uncle will promptly see to it," said the counsellor, with a low, ironical bow.

"Agreed!" cried the Amtsrat. "But, Franziska, how you are rushing to the door! Ah, yes, you have put on for those people"—he pointed in the direction of Prince's Court—"your best finery, and it is being smoked up here.

To be sure I have made it rather bad here, with the smoke and steam."

"And with what sort of smoke!" said she, maliciously, turning up her nose and shaking her silken train.

"Well, well, I beg your pardon! It is a fine weed, a strong weed! But you know as little about that as I do about your pekoe tea, Franzchen . . . But do not stand on ceremony! Your little feet are anxious to be gone as speedily as possible. You have done more than your duty in venturing into my 'smoky den'—if anyone had told me that a half-hour sooner! . . . So give your tiny mother your arm, Herbert, and lead her back quickly and gently to the sleigh."

He gallantly opened the door, and the old lady glided past him, both hands thrust into her muff, and immediately vanished in tne darkness on the other side of the house-door.

At this moment Margarete stooped and picked up from the floor the camelia, which Herbert, on lifting his fur-coat, had unconsciously dropped. In silence she offered him the flower.

"Ah, it came near being trampled upon!" said he, regretfully, holding the camelia to the light. "I should have been extremely sorry! It is as beautiful, as fresh and bright as the donor herself—do you not think so too, Margarete?"

She turned in silence to the window, at which grandmama, who was without, tapped impatiently, and he thrust the red flower, as he once had done the white rose, into his breast-pocket, and shook his father's hand in farewell—then he, too, went away.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE will had been read and had brought the bitterest disappointment to the workmen so suddenly discharged from the factory. The document was of an old date. A few years after his marriage Herr Lamprecht had been thrown from his horse; the physicians had not concealed from him and his family that his life was in danger, so he made his last will and testament. This document was short and concise, as the reading proved. His late wife, Fanny, was named as sole heiress; provision, too, was made for the sale of the business, for at that time there was no male heir—Reinhold having been born a year later. This last will was no longer valid, and the two only heirs, Margarete and Reinhold, entered upon the natural and uncurtailed rights.

Margarete, immediately after the will was read, returned to Dambach, "because grandpapa still needed her." Reinhold on the other hand seated himself on his stool, rubbed his cold hands, and as he did so scrutinized the working clerks as severely and loweringly as ever. His manner was unchanged. What could the will contain that could curtail in the least the rights he had already usurped? . . . And the men anxiously glanced at the inexorable ghostlike personage who now legally occupied the former employer's seat, and to whom they should have to look for favor and disfavor.

It was four o'clock on the afternoon of the same day. The counsellor had just come home, and the Frau Amtsratin was standing in the hall haggling with a hawker about a chicken, when Herr Lenz entered. Dressed in

black from head to foot, he approached the old lady with a sort of anxious haste; his usually so peaceful, pleasant face was uncommonly grave, and showed signs of inward agitation.

He inquired for the counsellor, and the old lady curtly directed him to her son's study; however, she glanced keenly at him and watched him until after modestly rapping at her son's door he entered. The man was evidently disturbed, some sort of a heavy burden lay upon his soul. She quickly dismissed the hawker and went to her room. She could hear the man talking over there; he spoke loudly and incessantly, and it sounded as if he were relating an incident. . . . The old artist had always been her pet aversion; she could not forget that his daughter Blanka had once occasioned her sleepless nights. . . . What could he want? Was the counsellor to intercede with Reinhold that the person discharged might have food and a place of shelter? That must not be!

Frau Amtsratin was a woman of extreme refinement, that was a well-known fact. Whosoever would have maintained that her tiny ear, concealed partly by a filmy lace cap, at times came in close contact with her son's door, would have been branded as a base slanderer. But now, indeed, she stood there, upon tip-toe, leaning forward and listening—listening until she started back suddenly as though struck by a shot, pale to her very lips.

The next moment she flung open the door and entered her son's apartment.

"Will you have the audacity, Lenz, to repeat to *my* face what you just now said?" she asked, in an arbitrary manner, but visibly trembling in every limb—all the gentleness had vanished from her shrill voice.

"Certainly I will, Frau Amtsratin!" replied Lenz, bowing with modest firmness; "you shall hear my statement

again word for word! The late Herr Kommerzienrat Lamprecht was my son-in-law—my daughter Blanka was his lawfully-wedded wife——"

The old lady burst into hysterical laughter. "My dear sir, it is sometime before Carnival—keep your coarse jests until then!" she exclaimed, with annihilating scorn, turning her back contemptuously upon him.

"Mama, I must urgently request you to return to your room!" said the counsellor, offering her his arm in order to lead her away—he, too, was as pale as a corpse, and upon his face was the reflection of a deep, inward agitation.

She refused his proffered arm angrily. "Were it an official matter of which you were treating, you would then have the right to put me out of your study; but this is a cunning, knavishly-devised trick to disgrace our family——"

"Disgrace?" repeated the old artist, in a voice which quivered with indignation. "Had my Blanka been the child of a forger, of a rogue, I should have been obliged to accept this insult in silence; but, as it is, I protest against any such expressions. I myself am the son of a government employé, whose name was highly respected; my wife comes of a family which, though impoverished, enjoys good standing, and we have both lived honest lives, not the slightest blemish rests upon our name, unless it be that owing to misfortune I, who was educated for an artist in the academy, was obliged to finally accept work in a factory. . . . But among the families of the commoners it has become the fashion to talk, too, of *mésalliance* when a penniless maiden marries one of its members, and to act as if the blood were polluted, as the nobility maintains with regard to the intruders from the ranks of the middle class. And to this utterly senseless prejudice did the deceased yield, thereby committing a sin against his tenderly beloved son——"

"Oh, is that so—I did not know that Herr Lamprecht had on his conscience any sin whatsoever committed against his only son, my grandson Reinhold!" interrupted the Frau Amtsratin, mockingly, with a contemptuous shrug of her shoulders.

"I am speaking of Max Lamprecht, *my* grandson!"

"Impertinence!" burst forth the old lady.

The counsellor advanced to her and besought her gravely and resolutely to refrain from making any other insulting interruptions. She should let the man finish speaking—it would show how much foundation there was in his pretensions.

She stepped to the nearest window and turned her back upon them both. Now the old artist drew forth a large envelope.

"Does this paper contain the legally-attested documents relating to the lawful consummation of the marriage?" asked the counsellor.

"No," returned Lenz; "it is a letter from my daughter, from London, in which she announces her marriage with Herr Lamprecht."

"And have you no other papers?"

"Unfortunately I have not. The deceased, after my daughter's death, took all the documents himself."

The Frau Amtsratin burst into laughter, and turned around. "Do you hear that, my son?" cried she, triumphantly. "The proofs are lacking—of course! This accusation made against Balduin is an attempt at blackmailing in *optima forma.*" She shrugged her shoulders. "It is possible that the seductive arts of the little coquette, who once before our eyes called them into play on the balcony of the warehouse, may not have been without their effect upon *him*, too; it may be possible that afterward in the world there were intimate relations between them—that is

nothing uncommon nowadays, although I should not have believed Balduin capable of such a connection. However, I will concede that—but a marriage? Rather would I allow myself to be hewn in pieces than to believe such nonsense!"

The old artist handed Herbert the letter. "Pray read it," said he, in a voice scarcely audible, "and then kindly appoint a time tomorrow when I can say more to you about this in your office! It is impossible for me to listen any longer to such disgraceful slander against my dead child. . . . Only with the greatest effort have I brought myself to allow the eyes of strangers to gaze upon the letter." His sorrowful gaze was fixed yearningly upon the letter which the counsellor had taken. "It seems to me like treason to my daughter, who in these lines confesses to her parents the only wrong she ever committed. We had no suspicion that my employer and master had behind our backs seduced our child into a love-affair—at his urgent request, his strict orders, she concealed all from us. . . . Had she died childless, I should never have stirred up the matter. She died in a strange land; no one in this town knew of the peculiar relations; therefore, there would have been no occasion to vindicate her honor. But in this case it is necessary to aid her son in obtaining his rights, and that I shall do with the help of all the means in my power——"

"You should have done that during my brother-in-law's lifetime!" interrupted the counsellor, almost violently, after pacing the floor in great agitation.

"Herbert!" cried the old lady. "Is it possible that you put the slightest faith in this network of falsehoods?"

"You are right, I was always a weakling in this arbitrary man's presence," replied Lenz, without heeding the Amtsratin's exclamation. "I should not have listened

from time to time to his promises as I unfortunately did. . . . When a year ago we saw our grandchild, and were allowed to take him into our home, the Kommerzienrat said that at the present time circumstances would not yet allow him to acknowledge publicly the son born of this second marriage. On the other hand he would make his will, in order, in case of an accident, to assure for little Max his rights as a son. . . . Well, he did not keep his

word—in the full sense of his robust health this 'accident,' his sudden death, may have seemed to him quite impossible. . . . But I do not despair—the legitimacy papers exist; the marriage certificate, my grandchild's certificate of baptism, must be among the deceased's effects. Therefore, do I come to you, sir. I do not like to employ an attorney. I put the matter in your hands."

"I accept it," replied Herbert. "Very shortly the seals will be removed, and I give you my word that everything shall be done to throw light upon the affair!"

"I thank you sincerely!" said the old man, extending his hand. Then he bowed in the direction of the Frau Amtsratin and left the room.

For a while silence reigned in the room, a silence as oppressive as that which usually follows the first gust of wind preceding an approaching storm—the cracking could be heard of the papers which Herbert took out of the envelope and unfolded, while his mother absently stared at the door behind which the "miserable fellow" had vanished. . . . Now, however, she collected herself.

"Herbert," she said, indignantly, to her son, who was reading, "can you see your mother standing before you in her terrible agitation and grief while you bury yourself in the lying scribble of that pitiful coquette?"

"It is no lying scribble mama," said he, evidently affected, raising his eyes.

"Ah, you are touched, my son? . . . Well, paper is patient, and the beautiful lady no doubt employed all her art of letter-writing to conceal her error from her parents. . . . And a man like you allows himself to be deceived and believes——"

"I believed before, mama."

"Absurd! The chatter of an old, half-witted man——"

"Dear mama, cease trying to calm yourself and me with

false representations; rather look the truth full in the face! . . . At the first explanatory words uttered by the old artist, a bandage seemed to fall from my eyes. Balduin's mysterious manner of the last few years, to which we in vain sought the clue, now lies clearly before me! He had to bear a terrible trouble in secret. Had not death deprived him of this second wife, it would have been different. With this beautiful, accomplished woman at his side he would probably have made up his mind after the lapse of some time to return with her to his home. As it was, the charm was broken. Nothing remained to him but the fact that he was old Lenz's son-in-law, and the coward within him triumphed—the pitiful coward!" he said, angrily. "How had he the heart to deny in his own house the boy, the magnificent boy, who should have been his pride? How could he bear to see Reinhold's envy of his little brother? . . . Poor little fellow! How he whispered in my ear at the dead man's coffin: 'I would rather kiss his mouth. He often kissed me in the doorway when we were quite alone——'"

"You see, my son, that all only proves that I am right, that this 'magnificent' boy is a—bastard!" the Amtsratin interrupted. She had grown quite calm; a smile even played about her lips. "But you seem entirely to have overlooked the principal reason why Balduin could and would not enter into a second marriage—his promise which Fanny took with her to the grave——"

"Yes, that is something for which I can scarcely forgive my sister!" said Herbert, almost violently. "It was horrible, unnatural, to take advantage of the grief of one left behind in order to bind a miserable man for life to a corpse's hand——"

"Well, we will not argue that; I view it with different eyes, and feel that this circumstance is and remains our

surest defence. Mind my words, the papers will *not* be found—they never existed! . . . So much the better! The affair can be settled with money; the fortune of the two legitimate heirs, of course, will have to suffer; what of that? It can be quietly arranged, and is far more preferable than the scandal of having a step-brother of low descent on his mother's side."

Her son stared fixedly at her. "Are you in earnest, mother?" he asked, eagerly. "Do you prefer seeing the dead in the grave with the brand of a dishonorable betrayer? Great God, to what immorality does not that miserable caste prejudice lead? . . . Was not Fanny, too, the daughter of a commoner? And was not her own mother, my father's first wife, too, not a simple girl of the people?"

"That is right! Proclaim these facts to the world, now when we are about to rise with rapid strides!" reproved the old lady, in a suppressed voice. "I cannot understand you, Herbert. Whence so suddenly this strange conception of things?"

"I have never thought otherwise!" he exclaimed, indignantly.

"Then it is your fault if I was mistaken. One never knows what you think. There is no confidence between us, such as there should be between mother and son—one is always groping for you in the dark. But think as you like about the matter, I adhere firmly to my standpoint. Indeed, I do prefer to know that an error in the family has been made amends for by money than suddenly to have it bruited abroad to everyone. . . . I should, too, like to ask, have you then no feeling for Fanny's children? If a third lawful heir should crop up they would lose a considerable sum."

"They would still have more than enough——"

"Perhaps in your eyes, but not in those of the world. Gretchen is one of the best matches in the land, and although she has recklessly enough rejected the most brilliant prospects, a time will and must come when she will be reasonable and look at these things as they are. But I do not for a moment doubt what would be the condition of her brilliant prospects were a third of the Lamprecht fortune to fall to another heir."

"A girl like Margarete would be sought after were her fortune to diminish materially," said Herbert. He stepped to the window, where he could avert his face from his mother's gaze. "The less the better!" he added, in a whisper.

She clasped her hands above her head. "Grete? Without money? What fancies you do have, Herbert!

Take from her this nimbus, and the poor creature would be like a bird stripped of its plumage! . . . Truly, I almost wish that after my death it would fall to your share to have to find a match for the girl!"

"That would be no difficult matter," said he, with an imperceptible smile.

"A trifle more difficult than if you had to employ a new clerk—you may believe your old mother, my son!" replied she, mockingly. "But why argue about such an insignificant thing!" she abruptly concluded the conversation. "We are both excited—I at the insolence of the person who has cast a bomb into our house, a bomb which upon closer examination proves to be of no consequence; and you because you have read the confession of a former flame. . . . When we are more composed, we will continue our talk. Of course for the present the matter must remain just between us two. The children, Margarete and Reinhold, will learn of it soon enough, if it becomes necessary to take from their inheritance the purchase-money in order to atone for their father's error—poor children!"

With these words she left her son's study.

CHAPTER XXII.

TODAY the sun shone upon the town, a pale, feeble wintry sun, which vainly beat upon the frost-hardened snowy armor on the roofs. To be sure a few tiny rivulets rolled downwards, but were arrested to hang as a silver fringe upon the eaves. The tender, yearning house-plants behind the windows rejoiced notwithstanding the sun's pale smile, and Papchen in Frau Amtsratin's *salon* shrieked as if the golden glints which his brass ring and the glittering picture-frames on the walls threw out were the radiance of summer which enticed him into the green below in the courtyard. . . . But Papchen, too, was especially happy today. He had not for a long time received so many pet-names, so many biscuits and so much sweet stuff from his mistress. It seemed as if especial sunshine was beaming upon the upper floor of the Lamprecht house. The beggar-children received more bread and less rebukes than usual, the cook left her kitchen-fire much oftener than was needful to try on again and again the new hat which the Frau Amtsratin had given her, and the housemaid, singing gaily, considered how she should have made over a present given her by her mistress, one of the old lady's cashmere dresses.

Below in the Lamprecht kitchen things looked different, because, as Barbe always said, they had hearts and not stones in their breasts. Of course the warehouse was nothing to any of them—such had been the custom for years in the main-building; but when in a lodging "just across the courtyard" there lay a sufferer, a Christian being could not act as though that lodging were but a heap

of stones in which no human heart was throbbing in fear and anxiety. Therefore were the occupants of the kitchen quiet and depressed, working involuntarily less noisily than usual.

The day before, towards night, Barbe had been drawing water at the courtyard-well, and the maid from the warehouse was there, too, getting fresh water. The woman sorrowfully related that several hours previous Frau Lenz had had a stroke of paralysis, she could not speak and her left side was useless—the doctor, who was still at her bedside, thought the matter very serious. And the tears gushed from her eyes as she described how old Herr Lenz paced the floor and wrung his hands, in his anguish and despair having not even a glance for little Max, who crouched in a corner at the bedside of his grandmama, looking constantly upon her distorted features, and tasting not a morsel of food. Then she whispered in the old cook's ear that Frau Lenz had looked very much agitated all day, that in the afternoon the master had come home, his face ghastly and his voice as hoarse as though his throat was parched. She, the maid, went into the kitchen to wash up her dishes; but soon afterward she heard a heavy fall in Frau Lenz's room; she had fallen upon the floor. What could have happened to frighten the poor woman she did not know, said the maid. But the Frau Amtsratin knew—the counsellor had summoned old Lenz to his office in order to tell him that not the tiniest bit of paper, not the slightest memoranda could be found among the documents left by the late Kommerzienrat, memoranda relating either to his legal marriage with his second wife or relating to the son born to them afterwards.

The secret which had threatened to weave a web about the proud main-building seemed to have become enshrouded in the mystery which conceals forever so many unsolved

problems in this world. There yet remained to old Lenz a personal inquiry at the London churches, for in London had his daughter been wedded, and his grandson baptized; but no mention was made in the young wife's letter of the church in which she "as a happy bride had stood by *his* side and received her marriage-ring." . . . Old Lenz furthermore told the counsellor that one day he received word from his daughter's nurse, who was likewise her friend, that a grandson had been born to him, and three days later a telegram had come with the announcement that the young wife was lying at the point of death. To be sure he had hastily made the journey to London in order once more to see his only child, but he arrived too late—the sod had already closed over her. His daughter's house, a home furnished in princely style, he found deserted; the nurse alone was there, to see to the sale of the furniture at the Kommerzienrat's orders. She informed him that Herr Lamprecht, after throwing the last handful of earth upon his wife's casket, had gone away at once. He had behaved like a madman, and she had avoided him as much as she could. He had not once seen his boy, much less caressed him—for the poor child had been the innocent cause of Blanka's death. Notwithstanding, he had taken with him the new-born infant and his nurse, for London he did not care to see again, he said.

The deceased's articles of clothing, linen and so forth he had given her for her services, added the lady, but he had himself taken all the documents in the writing-desk. Not a bit of paper with any writing upon it was left in the drawers, old Lenz had informed the counsellor, and such a remembrance of his daughter was the only one he desired, the only one he wished to claim. So nothing was left for him but her little pet, the dog Philine, which crouched neglected in a corner of the room, and which had gratefuliy

licked his caressing hand. . . . In the course of a year the Kommerzienrat returned to his German home a changed man, whose outbursts of despair had grieved and startled the aged parents of his deceased wife. He had arrived at night. Then only did they learn that he had left little Max in Paris, in the care of the widow of a late business friend, an excellent woman of refinement and education. The child was well cared for, the Kommerzienrat had corresponded regularly with the lady, and was kept posted about everything that concerned his little son; on the other hand he had never been able to decide to see the child again. . . . But a year ago the lady had died in Paris suddenly, and the Kommerzienrat expressed his intention of placing the boy in a school. However, Frau Lenz objected to this—the child was too young, it required a quiet, happy life, and training in the midst of a family; she would now claim the boy as its grandmother; she had been obliged long enough to suppress her yearning for Blanka's child; and terrified by her threat of calling in the aid of his relatives in case he should adhere to his purpose, he one day had little Max brought to his German home, to his grandparents' house. At that time a sudden change miraculously took place; at the sight of the handsome, intelligent boy the deepest tenderness was at one blow irresistibly awakened in the heart of the moody man. Often had he come late at night to the warehouse and sat for hours in silence at the bedside of the sleeping child, holding his tiny hand in his. He had, too, formed great plans for the future of this his youngest son.

All this the old artist related clearly and simply to the counsellor in the quiet office, and if a doubt had still lingered in Herbert's mind, it had vanished in the face of the old man's simple story. But in this case the firmest conviction could not decide, had it been entertained

by all the world, but rather the words "black and white." "Without legally attested documents all claims are useless; therefore, take the journey!" Herbert had said. "You will encounter great difficulties, and will need much time and money; but for the sake of your just cause you will not avoid these difficulties, nor hesitate to give up your time, and the money will be found at the proper time, you need not worry about that!" This was at least a faint ray of comfort, a straw to which to cling; but the old man was not able to even give his wife this consolation —at his first words she had fainted.

Meanwhile all proceeded in its usual rut in the counting-house. Had the young master suspected that a storm was brewing on the horizon, he would have thought of quite different things than the trifles which now took up his attention. He was not yet through with the old course. There were still here and there back-doors through which he might be defrauded. Not alone in the house had every corner to be again inspected, but, too, the court with its second gate, the warehouse-gate, required watchful eyes. The day-laborers came and went, food and wood might easily be taken out of the kitchen, and oats from the stables; every "lookout" upon the courtyard was, therefore, opened; shutters which had been closed for years were daily thrown back. Barbe had yesterday already felt the disadvantage of these posts of observation when she returned from the well with her bucket. The young master followed her into the kitchen, scolded the old cook severely, and forbade once for all the "new-fashioned servants' gossiping" at the fountain in the courtyard.

On this afternoon Margarete, too, returned from Dambach. She was satisfied with the result of her careful nursing—her grandpapa was much better. But the doctor, whom the counsellor interrogated, was of the

opinion that the disease could not be entirely cured as long as his father continued to live in the pavilion, which was lightly built and exposed to wind and weather; the old gentleman ought to spend the severest part of the winter in town. To this the Amtsrat agreed, so much the more readily as he was not to occupy the upper *étage*. A couple of rooms in the *bel-étage* above those occupied by the Lamprechts were to be prepared for his use on account of the floor being warmer.

Now it was necessary to make the old gentleman's apartments comfortable, and therefore was Margarete in town. Aunt Sophie was delighted to have her again, although Barbe in affright remarked that "dear Gretel's little face" looked so thin and sad. But Aunt Sophie, too, rejoiced in secret that the Amtsrat was to move to town; there would again be a man's will in the house, a voice which, when raised to command, inspired fear and respect. And this was necessary with regard to the little, domineering woman on the second floor, who now that the eyes of the former master were closed had allowed her secret aversion for that "rude, insolent person, Sophie," who interfered with household matters and found fault with "the old maid's" work as if she were her mistress, to come to light.

During the first hour of her arrival Margarete learned of the misfortune at the warehouse. Aunt Sophie and Barbe consulted in the kitchen as to the manner in which they could succeed in getting into old Lenz's hands a few delicacies for his sick wife.

"I will take them over," said Margarete.

Barbe clasped her hands over her head. "For God's sake, no—that would cause murder and bloodshed!" she vowed and declared. The young master was watching at the windows all the time; the people at the warehouse

were a thorn in his flesh ; he despised them more than had the Kommerzienrat. He had taken her, the old serving-woman to task the night before simply because she had talked with their maid, and if his own sister were so to "lower" herself—well, she did not want to witness the scene to follow!

Margarete was not to be dissuaded. Silently she took up the basket containing the jelly glasses and entered the

courtyard-room. There she donned a large white burnous of fluffy wool, and went upon her way.

But she had chosen an inopportune moment. At the instant she was going down the steps to the hall, her grandmama, in a velvet cloak trimmed with fur, descended the main staircase. She was evidently about to make a visit to town.

"What, so snow-white in the midst of the deepest mourning, Gretchen?" cried she. "Surely you are not going to town thus?"

"No, I am going to the warehouse," said Margarete, firmly, but with a timid glance in the direction of the counting-house, where the window clattered.

"To the warehouse?" repeated Frau Amtsratin, tripping with redoubled haste down the last steps. "First I must speak a word with you."

"I, too!" called out Reinhold, again closing the window. Soon after he entered the hall.

"Let us go into the sitting-room!" said their grandmama. She threw back her veil and preceded them, Margarete having to follow *nolens-volens*, for Reinhold walked close behind her like a gendarme.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SCARCELY having entered the room, he rudely seized Margarete's cloak and pushed it off the basket on her arm. "Raspberry jelly, apricot jelly"—he read the labels on the glasses—"good things from our larder! . . . And these dainties are to be eaten by Sir Poor Scholar, Grete?"

"Not by him, no!" said Margarete, calmly. "You probably know that Frau Lenz is seriously ill, that she has had a stroke of paralysis."

"No, I do not know it, I never hear such things because I never gossip with our people. I am just like papa was, he never inquired whether the occupants of the warehouse were alive or dead."

"And that is the proper way," agreed grandmama. "The principal of a manufactory *must* observe strict reserve—or what would become of him in the face of his hundreds of workmen? . . . But tell me, for Heaven's sake, Grete, what possessed you to put on that theatre wrap in broad daylight?" Her eyes rested with an expression of vexation upon the white burnous.

"I did not want to approach the sick woman's bedside in such deep black——"

"What? For this woman's sake would you lay aside the mourning for your father?" exclaimed the old lady, angrily.

"He will forgive me——"

"Papa?" laughed Reinhold, shortly and harshly. "Do not utter words in which you yourself do not believe, Grete! At the time that you wanted to play the sister of

mercy before our eyes at the warehouse he forbade your visit, 'for such intercourse had never been the custom in the house.' And that his wishes be obeyed I will see. . . . Is it not an unpardonable act for you to visit the person whom we were forced to discharge for notorious laziness?"

"The man is half-blind——"

"Ah, do you know that already? Well, yes, he tries to excuse himself on that plea; but it is not so bad. However, he has not been in our employ long enough for us —even allowing his blindness to exist—to be in duty bound

to see to him and his family. Ask the bookkeeper, he will tell you that I am doing right! Lay aside your theatre cloak! You must see that you are making yourself ridiculous with your unasked-for Samaritan service!"

"No, Reinhold, I cannot see that," she replied, softly, but firmly; "as little as I think it necessary for me to be unkind and merciless, because you are so. I do not like to oppose you, for I know that all opposition excites you; but in desiring to spare you vexation, I cannot slight other duties."

"Nonsense, Grete! What is the artist's wife to you?"

"She has a claim upon the aid and coöperation of her fellow-creatures just like any other sick person; therefore, be reasonable, Reinhold, and do not keep me from doing what I consider right and good!"

"Supposing I should forbid you, notwithstanding?"

"Forbid" she repeated, with agitation. "You have not the right to do that, Reinhold!"

He started towards her, his pale face flushing.

The Frau Amtsratin seized his hand. "How could you vex him so, Grete!" she rebuked. "Certainly he has some rights. In a short while he will be the unrestricted master here; for you surely know that the Lamprechts' family mansion falls with the business to the only male bearer of the name——"

"The daughter then will simply be paid her share, and she will have nothing more to do with the estate were it ten times over her birthplace!" interpolated Reinhold, with his boyish voice, as hastily as though he had for some time awaited the opportunity to make this disclosure to his sister.

"I know that, Reinhold," said she, sorrowfully, the grieved expression about her mouth deepening. "I know that with papa I, too, lost the dear old home. But you

are not yet the master here who can put me out if I do not submit to everything willingly——"

"Therefore, for the next few weeks you will remain the blockhead you have always been, and go to the warehouse at any price, eh, Grete?" interrupted Reinhold, with a malignant glance. According to his habit he with simulated unperturbability thrust his hands into his pockets, although he was trembling with anger. "Well, for my part," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "if you will not listen to me, Uncle Herbert shall set you right!"

"Leave him out of the question, Reinhold," said the grandmother, eagerly; "he will not interfere! He flatly refused to become Grete's guardian—well, why do you look at me so strangely terrified, Grete! My God, what eyes! . . . You are surprised that a man such as he is refuses to take in hand a girl whose head is as full of obstinacy as yours is? Well, my child, whosoever knows you, will hardly assume such relations with regard to you —only think of your unpardonable conduct in regard to the match for which we were all so anxious! But now is not the time for this! I am in a hurry, or my visit to Frau Sommer, who is ill, will be inopportune; therefore, I will briefly state that you are doing yourself an injustice by going to the people at the warehouse. . . . Very soon you will hear things, things which may possibly cost you a pretty penny. Should you nevertheless persist in your stubbornness, I, as your grandmother, forbid you now to pay this visit, and hope you will obey me as you properly should!"

She took her muff from the table, drew the veil over her face and was on the point of leaving when Reinhold detained her. "You spoke of money, grandmama?" he asked, with breathless anxiety. "I hope that the person

over there has not had the insolence to make claims against our house? Has he applied to Uncle Herbert?"

"Do not excite yourself, Reinhold!" soothed the old lady. "The matter is unsettled; who knows if it will ever amount to anything. At any rate we know that these Lenzs are cunning—therefore, let no pity be shown them say I! People do not waste benefits on their notorious enemies."

She left the room. But Reinhold took the basket with the jars of preserves which Margarete had stood upon the table, and called Aunt Sophie. She came out of the kitchen, and he asked her for the cellar-key.

"God forbid! That you cannot have—you certainly have nothing to do in my preserve-cellar!" declared Aunt Sophie, decisively. "You are dreadfully meddlesome! . . . And just let that basket alone—you have no right to the things! That is fruit out of my garden, which I put up every year for poor people."

He replaced the basket hurriedly upon the table, for he remembered that his aunt was truth itself, there was no reason to doubt her word. "Of course, then I have nothing to do with it," he admitted; "you can do what you please with your fruit. But you must not send it to the warehouse—that I will not allow!"

"Is that so—you will not allow it? See here, this head" —she touched her brow with her index finger—"has acted for itself for forty years—for my dear parents have been dead that long—has acted independently and not allowed itself to be turned and twisted just as others liked, and now such a 'child' as you comes and wants to dictate to me? Your father did not do that!"

"Oh, he would have acted very differently had he known that this Monsieur Lenz was his secret enemy! I never trusted the pack at the warehouse, their sanctimonious ways were always disgusting to me from childhood. Now

that papa's eyes have closed, they show their teeth—real Jesuits! . . . It is incomprehensible to me that grandmama should make such mysterious allusions—I should have insisted upon perfect candor! But I know that nothing can be done with her when she has on her visiting-cloak; the ground burns her feet, and she acts as if the welfare of the whole town depended upon her calls. Well, you will be reasonable, Grete! That is right, put your white cloak back in the press! But do not fancy that I believe in your perfect conversion! I shall keep a sharp lookout upon the courtyard and the warehouse, upon that you may depend."

With this threat he left the sitting-room, while Margarete hung the cloak over her arm in order to carry it away.

"Tell me, Grete, what strange stories are these? What is it about the old Lenzs?" exclaimed Aunt Sophie, when the door had closed behind Reinhold.

"They are supposed to be our enemies," replied the young girl, smiling bitterly.

"Nonsense! What stuff is invented in the upper story!" said Aunt Sophie, angrily. "If the old man with his kind, honest face is false and hypocritical, you may depend upon it"—she pointed to her heart—"that all humanity is worthless, and that the fate of men need not be worried about! . . . But the story is not true, I will wager my little finger!"

"I put as little faith in it as you, and all hints and threats would not prevent me from going to see the sick woman," said Margarete. "But for Reinhold's sake I dare not. At the least excitement his face turns so livid, and that worries me so much, aunt! His condition is evidently worse, although the doctor will not admit it. How could I do anything to provoke and vex him? We

must devise other ways and means of helping the sufferer somewhat."

A little later she ascended to the *bel-étage ;* she had been having the rooms designed for her grandpapa—aired and heated. The purposed refurnishing of the *bel-étage* in October had until now of course been postponed ; the pictures and mirrors were still standing in the hall of the haunted wing.

Now again some life was to enter the silent rooms, warmth was to be infused into the icy atmosphere of the immense hall, which the young orphan today thought enclosed the entire melancholy of the terrible catastrophe. Here, where all the windows looked towards the north, a wintry, dismal light glimmered, and without upon the broad expanse of snow which stretched beyond the town and joined the cloudless blue sky far, far away, there glimmered, too, the faint yellow light of the afternoon sun—all as cold and lifeless, as cheerless as if the withered and black boughs of the fruit-trees would never be covered with blossoms.

Margarete stepped up to the last window of the hall ; here she had heard her father's voice for the last time in this life, and here in the deep, dark recess had she, after a five years' absence, concealed herself, in order, unperceived, to watch "the new comedy" in her paternal halls. . . . Yes, and then, too, the former student had met her as one of the high city officials, and she had ridiculed the "Herr Landrat" in secret. Oh, she could not again reach this standpoint with all her boasted strength, her self-will? Involuntarily her fist was clinched, and her gaze wandered over the expanse without with powerless bitterness. But at this moment she started and drew back—the counsellor was crossing the courtyard, coming from the warehouse gate. Possibly he had noticed her gesture of anger, for

he smiled and bowed, and then she fled into the sitting-room designed for grandpapa, the red drawing-room. But her hasty retreat availed her naught ; a few moments later Herbert stood beside her. . . . He had come almost daily to Dambach on his father's account, and yet he now extended his hand to her as if he had not seen her for a long time.

"It is well that you are here again!" said he. "Now we can nurse our patient together. It was time, too, for you to return to this house with its lofty, airy rooms—your stay in the small, close rooms of the pavilion was not beneficial to you, you grew so pale." With a sarcastic yet anxious smile he sought her eyes, but she averted them as he continued : "The pale, girlish face at the window startled me somewhat when I stepped out of the warehouse——"

"Out of the warehouse?" she asked, incredulously.

"Yes, I was looking after the poor, sick woman—have you any objection to make, Margarete?"

"I? I should object to your acting so purely human and kind?" cried she, with animation. Her eyes glowed, she was at this moment the enthusiastic girl whose blood coursed more swiftly in her veins owing to her warm, noble sentiments. "No, in that I think as you do—uncle!"

"Well, once at any rate have I done something that suits you—I can hear that in your voice! . . . We are both impulsive—but a gray, stiff-jointed uncle is not suited to that ; you feel that, too, for the respectful title was difficult for you to utter—shall we not bury the old uncle?"

A faint smile played about her mouth. Notwithstanding, she said evasively : "No, he must remain! What would grandmama say were I again to lapse into my 'childish rudeness?'"

"That would only be my affair and yours."

"Oh, no, not so unconditionally —certainly not! Grandmama will not relinquish her guardianship over us all as long as she lives, that I know!" she replied bitterly. "And you may consider yourself fortunate that she has not found out about your visit to the warehouse; she would be extremely angry."

He laughed. "And what would be the boy's punishment? To kneel in the corner, or to have no supper? No, Margarete," he added, gravely, "as much as I desire to shield my mother from all vexation and trials, and to make her life as pleasant and easy as possible, I cannot allow her to influence my actions materially. Therefore, you will frequently see me coming from the warehouse."

She raised her eyes to his. "Had a doubt existed in my mind it would have vanished in the face of your calm judgment. The old artist, whom I have loved from childhood, *cannot* be our enemy!"

"Who says so?"

"Grandmama. Is it true that he makes claims upon us?"

"Yes, Margarete, it is true," he confirmed, very seriously. "He has much to ask of you. Will you suffer it without protest?"

"How could I do otherwise, if the claim was a just one?" she replied, without hesitation; but the flush of sudden surprise dyed her cheeks.

"Supposing this claim should considerably diminish your fortune?"

She smiled.

"Up to this time it has always been taken care of and paid out to me by others; I can, therefore, not really judge of the real value of money; but of this I am sure, that I had a thousand times rather earn my bread with my needle than to have a groschen which did not belong to me. . . . I know, too, that you would not uphold anything unjust; therefore, I am prepared for any sacrifice!"

"Brave little soul, your foot is always in the stirrup when a brave deed is to be accomplished!"

Her face darkened. "An ill-chosen comparison, for I cannot ride," she responded, sharply, with a shrug of her shoulders. "The aristocratic world plays a part in all your thoughts, uncle!"

He suppressed a smile. "What can you expect? One cannot so easily withdraw from the ban of the sphere in which one lives a great deal. Would you have become the ardent champion of freedom, of a proud, strong commonalty if you had not lived in Uncle Theobald's house? I scarcely think so."

"You are mistaken! That did not come upon me, I was not inoculated with it, it was born in me. It was peculiar to my blood, to my mind, it needed not awakening, external influences, as they say of Raphael." A trace of her former sauciness played about her mouth. "He would have been a great artist had he been born without hands." She however immediately grew grave, and returned to the subject broached by Herbert. "Upon what right does

old Lenz base his claims?" she asked. "To what extent is he our creditor?"

"You will have to have patience a short while," he replied, with hesitation, glancing keenly at her face, as if doubtful whether to speak now or not.

"Ah, is that my guardian's affair only?" she inquired, with apparent indifference, but her cheeks flushed and her voice had a sharp ring in it.

"You have no guardian yet," he answered, with a smile.

"Surely, not just at present—you did not want to be."

"Has that, too, been repeated to you? Well, yes, I refused because everything aimless is objectionable to me."

"Objectionable? Ah, yes, then grandmama was right in saying you refused this office because you thought nothing could be done with my infinite stubbornness."

"Indeed, this assertion might be true—you are naughty enough!" He looked at her with a roguish, sidelong glance. "However, I should not be afraid ; I should get on with this 'infinite stubbornness.' But I have another reason, and you shall soon hear it."

They were interrupted ; an upholsterer entered. The counsellor intended putting down new carpets for his father. The man now came to take the dimensions of the room, and while Herbert was conferring with him, Margarete made her escape.

"Yes, you are right, Jette, it is a pity!" said Barbe, with a sigh, to the housemaid at the moment that Margarete passed the open kitchen-door on her way to the courtyard-room. The old cook was rolling out dough on the board. "Yes, it is a sin and a shame that not a soul here in this house can raise a finger to help the poor folks over there!" she continued, angrily. "What harm would it do were I to carry over a bowl of noodle-soup for the old man and the child? But—Heaven forbid! I would not try it! The

one in the counting-house would take my head off." Indignantly she sprinkled a handful of flour over the dough. "Yes, and the old lady must be very bad; the maid has just got some ice again from the fountain, and I have seen the doctor come twice today—mark my words, Jette, the woman will die! She will die! My kettles have not sung for a long time as they did all this forenoon on the stove; that always means a death in the house—always!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE next day there was a great commotion in the *bel-étage*. Upholsterers, painters and chimney-sweeps came and went, and Margarete was busy from early in the morning. And it was fortunate she had not much leisure, for the brooding had robbed her of her night's rest—she had lain all night with open eyes, and her brain and heart were filled with weird fancies.

The pictures were to be hung in their old places in the red drawing-room. . . . For the first time since the tapers had burned for the dead in the hall, Aunt Sophie opened the corridor back of Frau Dorothea's room, and Margarete followed her with dusting-cloth and feather-brush; she intended seeing to the cleaning of the pictures.

She shuddered as she stepped into the dark passage, —it was terrible to her. Her father's strange manner on the afternoon when he locked himself in beautiful Dore's room, his enigmatical allusions on the night of the storm —of which he said that it, not the sun alone, could bring to light many a secret—and the dreadful way which she took over these old creaking boards and through the warehouse attic, leading to the body of him so suddenly taken away, all again grieved her anew.

She stepped as timidly and doubtfully as if the sound of her footsteps might animate and awaken the forms ranged on the walks, and all the secrets of the old house, which they had carried to the grave with them, would be suddenly called into life.

The picture of lovely Dore was still leaning against the corner of the cupboard, just as the deceased had put it there ; the storm had not touched it. . . . Upon turning the portrait of this beautiful woman she seemed to her doubly charming and attractive, after having dusted the faces of so many expressionless, commonplace women. She kneeled before the picture several moments, and wondered what those magnetic eyes, that charming, smiling, rosy mouth could have done that after the lapse of hundreds of years such anger could have been called forth as she had seen her father exhibit at that particular moment.

Downstairs Friedrich, the butler, who came out of the red drawing-room and cast a shy glance at the open corridor, said : "Our mistress is now kneeling before 'the lady with the rubies!' If she only knew what *I* know! In her lifetime the woman must have been a veritable satan, that she cannot even rest in her frame. The ungodly portrait by rights belongs in the attic, behind the chimney, say I—for my part she could walk around there without a frame!"

But the picture was not relegated to the attic. With the assistance of the upholsterer Margarete hung it in its old place. Then she went down into her quiet courtyard-room to warm herself a little.

She seated herself at the window, and looked out into the snowy courtyard. The cold had somewhat moderated, occasionally a tiny ball of snow fell from the linden boughs ; finches, tomtits and sparrows flew around the

feeding-places arranged for them, and the doves, too, came down and helped to pick up the scattered grains.

Suddenly the whole flock of birds flew away —some one must have entered the courtyard from the warehouse. Margarete leaned over the sill, and saw little Max, his anxious eyes fixed upon the kitchen-window, stamping through the snow towards the main-building.

The young lady was terrified. If Reinhold should see the boy there would be a scene. She opened the window and in a half-suppressed voice called the boy to her. He came at once, took off his cap and she saw tears in his bright eyes.

"Grandmama wants to be turned, and grandpapa cannot lift her alone," said he, hurriedly. "The servant has gone away; I have looked everywhere for her, all through town, but I cannot find her. Now we have no one! Ah, that is too bad! So I was going to kind Barbe——"

"Go and tell your grandpapa that he shall have help immediately!" whispered Margarete, hastily closing the window.

The little one ran home straightway, while Margarete seized her white burnous and went into the sitting-room.

Aunt Sophie was on the point of going out.

The young girl hurriedly told her that assistance was needed at once at the warehouse, adding in conclusion: "I now know how I can reach there unperceived—through the corridor and the warehouse attic! Have you the key to the room?"

Her aunt took a new key from the nail, and handed it to her. "Here, Grete, go for God's sake!"

Margarete flew up the stairs, not without casting a fearful, sidelong glance at the counting-house window; but the curtain did not move; the hall was deserted, nor was a face to be seen at the windows looking on the courtyard, while upstairs in the red drawing-room were only the upholsterers busy laying the carpets.

She flitted through the hall and the still open doors of the corridor; the new lock on the attic-door was quickly opened, and no obstacle met her in the entire garret, all the doors were open, even the one leading to the staircase was unlocked.

Drawing a deep breath Margarete entered the old peoples' sitting-room. No one was within; but through the kitchen-door, which was ajar, came a slight sound. The young lady opened the door wider, and looked into the room filled with the smell of cooking.

The old artist was standing at the fire, trying to pour into a cup some liquor from the steaming kettle. His spectacles were pushed upon his forehead and his face wore an anxious expression—the occupation of cooking to which he was unused seemed to cause him great anxiety and annoyance.

"I will help you!" said Margarete, as she closed the kitchen-door behind her.

He looked up. "My God, you have come yourself, Fraulein?" cried he, joyfully. "Max played me a trick—

unknown to me he sought for aid at your house; he is a determined little fellow, who never wants to return home without having accomplished his object."

"He did right, the good child!" said Margarete. As she spoke she took the kettle out of the old man's hand, and poured the broth through the colander, which the awkward cook had forgotten, into the cup.

"This is the first nourishment my poor patient has been able to take," he said, with a happy smile. "Thank God, she is much better! She has regained her speech, and the doctor hopes for the best."

"Will it not harm her if a face she is not used to seeing, such as mine, should approach her?" asked Margarete.

"I will prepare her." He took the cup and carried it through the sitting-room into the adjoining chamber.

Margarete remained behind—she did not have to wait long.

"Where is the kind young lady?" she heard the sufferer ask. "Let her come in! Ah, how that pleases and comforts me!"

The young girl stepped over the threshold, and Frau Lenz extended her unparalyzed arm to her. Her face was as white as the linen upon which she lay, but her eyes were clear and bright.

"She comes as white and light as a dove of peace!" said she, with emotion. "Ah, yes, she always was so fond of white, she who went from us never to return——"

"Do not speak of that now, Hannchen!" her husband warned, anxiously. "You wanted to be put in a more comfortable position, therefore has Fraulein Lamprecht come hither, as I have told you already · she will help me to turn you."

"Oh, I thank you! I am quite comfortable, and had I up to this time lain upon nettles, I believe I should not

feel them any more. . . . I am so happy now! The sight of the dear, youthful face has refreshed me. Yes, I too had a daughter, young and beautiful and an angel of goodness. But I was too proud of this gift of God, and for this——"

"Hannchen!" interrupted the old man, with evident anxiety. "You must not talk so much! And Fraulein Lamprecht will not be able probably to stay with us long——"

"I beg of you let me speak!" cried she, greatly excited. "There is a load upon my breast, and it must be removed." She drew a deep breath. "Can you not understand that an unhappy mother wishes to enjoy the melancholy bliss of speaking before others of her dead darling? . . . Do not fear, Ernst, you dear, faithful man!" she added, with more composure. Did not the counsellor's visit yesterday half cure me? To be sure I could not see him, and talk with him ; but I heard all that he said to you. The noble man has faith in us, and every kindly word was salvation to me."

She pointed to an oval porcelain likeness which hung above her bed. "Do you know her?" she asked, her eyes fixed almost greedily upon the young lady's face.

Margarete drew nearer. Yes, she knew that face with its fresh, dewy lips, its blue eyes and its wealth of golden hair above the brow, that charming, beautiful face!

"Lovely Blanka!" said she, with emotion. "I have never forgotten her! On that night when Herr Lenz bore me up here in his arms, the hair, which in the picture falls over her breast in braids, fell loosely down her back and gleamed like a fairy's veil."

"On that night," repeated the sick woman, with a sigh ; "ah, on that night when with her agitated heart she fled into the darkness! Alas, for the unsuspecting

parents!" escaped her lips. "Alas, for the blind mother who did not understand how to guard her lamb!"

"Hannchen!"

The old lady paid no heed to the exclamation, nor to her husband's beseeching look.

"Go, my dear child," she turned to little Max, who was sitting at the foot of the bed. "Go into the kitchen to Philine. Do you hear her whining? She wants to come in, and the doctor has forbidden it."

The boy rose obediently, and went out.

"Is he not a good, beautiful child?" asked the sufferer, with agitation, the tears sparkling in her eyes. "Should not every father be proud to possess such a heavenly treasure? . . . And he—can he who took with him to the grave his son's honor and life's happiness, can he enjoy the celestial bliss?"

"I beseech you, dear wife, do not talk any more! Not today!" implored the old man; he was trembling in every limb. "I shall ask Fraulein Lamprecht to visit us again tomorrow, when you will be stronger and more composed."

The woman silently but energetically shook her head in the negative, and with her right hand seized Margarete's. "Do you still remember what I said to you when you assured me that you loved our Max, and would keep an eye upon him in his course through life?"

Margarete pressed her hand gently and soothingly. "You said that circumstances frequently quite suddenly altered one's views, and who could tell if in four weeks' time I should think as I do at this moment. . . . Well, then the relations between us have already changed, as I have been told, how much I do not know; however, be that as it may, what can this change have to do with my liking for the child? Is he any the less worthy of love?

But now I must really beg of you, do not talk any more today! I will come to see you every day, and you shall tell me whatsoever can ease your heart."

The old lady smiled bitterly. "Perhaps on your return today you will be forbidden to visit the despised family."

"I take a way which is unknown to others. I came through your attic today, too."

The sick woman's eyes opened wide in painful agitation. "The miserable way into which my poor lamb was enticed?" she cried, passionately. "Ah, yes, she went there, and the mother who would have given her heart's blood to preserve her child's purity of soul was blind and deaf, she was asleep like the foolish virgins in the Bible. I have never set foot in the ill-fated corridor through which the White Lady of your house is said to walk; but I know a curse rests upon it," said she; "my idol was ruined thereby. Do not enter it again!"

"That shall not keep me away—I enter it in the execution of my duty to my fellow-creatures!" said Margarete, with an unsteady voice and panting breath. It seemed to her as if she were suddenly looking into a mysterious, dark depth, from which arose familiar outlines.

"Yes, you are as kind and merciful as an angel; but with the best of intentions you cannot exceed human bounds!" exclaimed the sufferer, as with a powerful effort she raised herself upon her pillows. "You, too, will finally condemn us when you hear that we have instituted claims without being able to produce proofs. . . . Oh, good God, for but one single gleam of light amid this torturing darkness! . . . We shall be driven out, and Blanka's son will not know where to lay his head, the child for whom her young life was sacrificed!"

With pallid lips Margarete seized the old lady's hand. "Not these semi-allusions!" she besought, with difficulty

conquering her own terrible agitation, which caused her heart to pulsate violently, and almost deprived her of breath. "Tell me frankly what oppresses you? You will find me composed, may these disclosures be what they will!"

The old artist hastily bent over his wife, and whispered several words in her ear.

"She must not hear it yet?" she asked, turning her head away impatiently. "And wherefore not? Are we to wait until you return from London, and, if empty handed, it will always remain an unsolved mystery? No, she shall at least know that it is a legitimate heir who is being cast out from his father's house because he can show no written proofs. . . . Max is as much your brother as the wicked, domineering youth in the counting-house!" said she to the girl, with merciless determination. "For one brief year Blanka was your mother, she was your dead father's second wife."

Exhausted her head sank back among the pillows, but Margarete stood for a moment as if turned to stone. It was less the abrupt, unreserved unveiling of the fact which affected her than the bright light which in one single moment illumined a whole chain of mysterious events.

Yes, it was this secret marriage which had so darkened the latter years of her father's life. She now knew that he had tenderly loved the issue of this second marriage, and yet had not been possessed of the courage to acknowledge him openly. But she knew, too, that at the horrible moment when he feared that the beloved child lay crushed beneath the fallen timbers, the firm resolution rose within him to establish him in all his rights. "Tomorrow there will be a storm upstairs, a storm as severe as that which has just caused our old house to tremble," he had said on that stormy night, as he pointed to the upper story. Yes,

"HE SHALL ALWAYS BE A BELOVED BROTHER TO ME," SAID SHE, WITH EMOTION. (P. 318.)

he indeed expected violent scenes. Well, death had saved him this encounter, with the prejudices of the world so feared by him, but at what a price!

"You have in your possession no written proofs, did you not say so?" she asked, in a half-stifled voice.

"None," responded the old artist, and bitter disappointment lay in the glance which he cast upon the young lady. "At least, none of any value in the eyes of the law. These the deceased took at my daughter's death; but they were not to be found among his papers; they have disappeared entirely."

"They must and will be found," said she, firmly. With these words she went into the kitchen and soon re-entered the room holding little Max's hand. "He shall always be a beloved brother to me," said she, with emotion, twining her right arm about the boy and laying her left hand as if in blessing upon his curly head. "The child is to me a legacy from my father—a sacred one! . . . No one knew of the secret of his latter days; only to me did he finally throw out hints. To be sure, they were enigmatical to me; but now I know the solution. Had my father lived but two days longer, this poor orphan would now bear our name. . . . But I shall not rest until his last wish, which before his death filled heart and head, is fulfilled. . . . So, do not say any more!" cried she, extending her hand towards the sick woman, who with an expression of happiness upon her face was about to open her lips. "You must rest now! Eh, Max, grandmama must sleep, so she will soon be well again?"

The boy nodded, and stroked his grandmama's hand. He again took up his post at the foot of the bed, while Margarete, followed by Herr Lenz, went into the sitting-room. Here in the deep recess of the window he told her more, which caused her to weep copiously. The shock to

her nerves had been very great, and for the sake of the sufferer Margarete had bravely suppressed her emotion; but now came the reaction, and the relieving tears could no longer be restrained.

Before leaving she once more looked into the bedroom. Little Max pointed to his grandmama, and put his finger to his lips—she was apparently sleeping peacefully and soundly; she had lifted the load from her mind, and a younger, stronger person had assumed it.

A few minutes later Margarete ascended the attic-stairs in the warehouse. She walked as if in a dream, but an uneasy one. Not more than half an hour had passed since she had flitted unsuspectingly down these stairs, but what a change had taken place within her in this half-hour. . . . It was now clear to her why her papa had appealed to her strength and fidelity! He had accused himself of a fatal weakness—yes, it was this weakness, the fear that society would ostracize him on account of his second marriage, which had poisoned his life!

Involuntarily she paused, and looked over at the main-building. A cutting wind whistled through the open dormer-window, and glittering icicles framed the small circle like dragons' teeth. Margarete shivered, but not with the cold, which felt refreshing to her burning cheeks —she saw before her the struggles which must ensue within the old mansion, until right was triumphant and the youngest-born was allowed to enter his father's house. Was not the sick woman right? Was not this handsome, robust boy a veritable godsend to the house of Lamprecht, which had but one representative? But what cared the cold-hearted, proud old lady in the upper floor for the assured continuance of the dearly-loved firm? The child was the grandson of the despised "artist-folks," and that was sufficient to arouse to indignation every drop of

blood in her body, and to spur her on to defer the acknowledgment of the orphan as long as possible. And Reinhold, the economical merchant, who had laid both hands firmly upon the inherited money-chest, certainly would not part with a groschen without the most violent opposition!

She crossed the boards, which creaked beneath her feet. Ah, yes, it was not only the rude soles of the packers which had passed over them, dainty girlish feet had lightly touched the rough floor—"a white dove" had once flown in and out. At this sudden thought a warm flush mounted to her cheek, so that for one moment she buried her face in her hands; then she proceeded more hastily towards the door which led to the fatal corridor—she did not suspect that indeed harm lurked behind this door.

CHAPTER XXV.

MEANWHILE an exciting scene had been enacted in the main-building. Barbe had carried up some lunch to the upholsterers, and, after chatting with them awhile, she opened the door in order to leave the red drawing-room; but the door was immediately closed, and with a shriek the old cook tottered back into the room. At first she could not speak; pointing towards the door, she sank into the nearest chair and threw her apron over her head. Nothing was to be seen outside, said one of the workmen, who had gone out to see what could have inspired the robust old woman with such fear.

"I believe you, all cannot see it! Ah, that is my death!" Barbe moaned from beneath her apron. Then she tried to rise, but her limbs were so weak and trembling that for quite a time she was obliged to remain seated. Gradually she dropped her apron and looked around timidly, her healthy, rosy color had given place to an ashen pallor. But she said no more—those men were strangers, she must not tell them anything, they would repeat it, and then the whole town would know in a few hours what had happened at the Lamprechts!

Fortunately the workmen soon after finished their task, so she did not have to pass alone through the long hall. She walked between the two men, turning neither to the

right nor left, and finally crept into her kitchen—yes, "crept," said the servant, like a ghost she entered and sank upon the bench. Here, however, her tongue was loosened. Now she had appeared to her, she of the rubies; now let anyone come and try to dissuade her from knowing what she had seen with her own eyes! Let him come!

And the man-servant, together with old Jette, started in amazement; the coachman joined them, and just at the moment that Friedrich asked: "Did she have on the grass-green dress with the train, in which she appeared to me that time?" an apprentice came from the counting-house to get a glass of sugar-water for the young master.

"Lord no—not green!" gasped Barbe, with an energetic shake of her head. "Something white, snow-white, fluttered around the corner of the corridor! She must have been laid out just like that!" And to that she added a description which made even the apprentice's hair stand on end.

But through him the event reached the counting-house. Reinhold was extremely angry with the young man for staying away so long, and so the latter excused himself with the excitement in the kitchen.

Immediately the master went over. He wore a heavy fur-coat and his warm otter-cap. "You must now go upstairs with me, and show me the spot where you are supposed to have seen the White Lady!" he said, severely, to the old cook, who was trembling in every limb. "I must see if we cannot get to the bottom of this ghost! . . . You cowards are doing my house an injury—how am I to find tenants if later on I want to give up the rooms we do not need? . . . Forwards, Barbe! You know I will have no nonsense!"

Old Barbe could not utter a word of resistance. With shaking knees she followed him up the stairs along the hall,

her fear at the end of the corridor had availed her nothing; he seized her by the arm and pushed her by the row of portraits as far as the stairs which led to the warehouse attic.

Suddenly he sprung up there, pushed the door of the attic open a little farther and peeped through the aperture, and when he turned his face again towards Barbe, his large, dull, gray eyes were full of life, they sparkled like those of a cunning cat.

"Now go down to your kitchen again," he commanded, with a malevolent grin, "and tell the other cowards that a ghost, which has a basket filled with preserves with it, is not dangerous! First of all, go up to grandmama! I would like her to come into the red drawing-room."

Barbe hurriedly made her exit, but she felt rather ridiculous, she felt instinctively that she had done a very foolish thing. And when Aunt Sophie returned from her walk, she began to tell her her story after a few preliminaries, but scarcely had she uttered several words when Aunt Sophie drew back in horror. "Oh, you miserable Barbe!" she lamented, and without laying aside her hat and cloak she hurried up the stairs.

She would have given anything to save her "Gretel" a violent scene, or at least to temper it by an explanation, but she came too late. At the same moment she entered the hall, Reinhold, accompanied by his grandmama, came out of the red drawing-room.

He made a low, ironical bow in the direction of the corridor, and the Frau Amtsratin called out: "Ah, my dear Grete, you seem to like yourself as the beautiful Dore! A short while since you appeared as if descended from the frame in her wedding-dress, and today you terrify the servants as the White Lady——"

"Yes, as the Lady with the Rubies!" completed Reinhold. "Barbe is beside herself! She saw the white theatre-mantle in the corridor, and set the whole household in a commotion. It has come to this! Those below are banded together against me, and now one betrays the other, although involuntarily!"

During this impertinent speech Margarete turned the corner of the corridor. She made no reply—surprise seemed to seal her lips.

"False woman!" Reinhold snarled, approaching her. "You take such sly means, eh? You learned fine things in the world!"

"Reinhold, control yourself!" warned Margarete, with calm gravity and true dignity, as she attempted to pass him in order to reach Aunt Sophie's side; but he barred

her way. "That is right, fly to your governess! She has always shielded you——"

"You, too!" interrupted Aunt Sophie. "Your governess I never was"—a dry laugh escaped her—"I know neither French nor English, nor do I know anything about deportment—but I have been like 'Faithful Eckard' to you. I have guarded you as well as I could, and as long as you needed me, and when for years your weak limbs refused to support you, my arms bore you through the house and courtyard and into the fresh air. . . . I never left you to the care of strangers. . . . Now you can walk, but not to afford others pleasure. You are like a gaoler who goes from door to door and listens, you even grudge your fellow-creatures the air they breathe, leaving out of the question their own thoughts and comfort—all must dance as you whistle—the old Lamprecht homestead seems to me like a prison. Therefore, I think it high time to leave. I do not need you and your charity; but I shall take Gretel with me!"

During this lecture the tall young man's head shrank deeper and deeper into his thick fur-collar, and his eyes shyly sought the wall. He remembered quite distinctly, how for weeks, night after night, Aunt Sophie had watched beside his sick-bed, and had with her own hands prepared dainty morsels with which to tempt him; he remembered how when he was a boy of seven she had carried him up the stairs, and the flush, which for a moment overspread his sallow face, was probably the flush of shame. The Frau Amtsratin, however, was evidently indignant.

"Do you really think we would let our granddaughter go away with you?" she asked, angrily. "That is somewhat bold and overhasty, my dear! I think the wealthy heiress will consider well before she removes to a poverty-stricken dwelling."

Aunt Sophie smiled good-naturedly. "It is well for the State that you do not estimate the finances, Frau Amtsratin! It is really not as bad as you think for—or my name would not be Lamprecht! Be it observed that I only say this to spurn the accusation of boldness and overhastiness!"

Margarete advanced to her aunt, and tenderly put her arm around her loved form. "Grandmama is mistaken,"

said she. "In the first place I am not the wealthy heiress I am supposed to be, and secondly I should be heartily glad to go with you into a 'poverty-stricken dwelling,' could I only be with you. But for the present neither of us can leave the house; I have a mission to fulfil, and you must stand by me, aunt!"

"Very well, the mission-road shall from now on be closed to you, Grete—I shall have the door leading to the warehouse walled up—it is of no use anyhow—and so there is an end of it! I will see if I cannot have peace!" said Reinhold, as with a shudder he drew his furs more tightly across his breast and walked towards the exit—the faint stirring of a better feeling had been already suppressed. "It is, moreover, to be frank, somewhat impertinent of you to find fault with your inheritance," he added, once more turning back. "You have received far more than a daughter has any right to. Had papa—as was his duty to me as his business successor—made a will betimes, matters would be quite different; as it is, I have to pay out to you enormous sums."

"Yes I am of the opinion, too, that this large fortune is not all mine—I shall be obliged to share it!" replied Margarete, significantly.

"With me again?" laughed Reinhold, scornfully. "You need not consider that! You have not the right to do so. Nor do I want your generosity, any more than I have any idea of giving away one penny of mine. Everyone for himself is my maxim! . . . I will take this opportunity, too, to say to you, grandmama, that there is not a trace to be found of any business contract between papa and that man over there," he pointed towards the warehouse. "That claim, of which you make such a secret, is a fraud, and nothing to me—I wish to know nothing more about it! . . . I thank you, however, for coming downstairs at my request;

you were able to convince yourself of the perfidious and deceitful way my sister has of acting."

He went out and closed the door noisily behind him.

Margarete turned pale to her lips.

"Do not take this to heart, Gretel!" comforted Aunt Sophie. "You have been used to nothing else from childhood; you have always been the scapegoat! And thereby he has become a heartless fellow, a selfish——"

"A man, who, though so young, you should say, dear Sophie, a man who does not mistake an X for a U, and allows no trifling with him," interrupted the Frau Amtsratin. "It is Margarete's own fault if he has said unkind things to her. She should not go to people who she knows have made unjustifiable claims on the fortune."

"Those claims are just," said the young girl, firmly.

"What!" cried the grandmama, "have these miserable people, in return for the daughter's kindness, spoken against her dead father? And you believe the story?" She hurriedly drew her hood on. "It is too cold for me here—come upstairs with me, Grete, the matter must be talked over!"

Margarete followed her in silence, while Aunt Sophie, with an anxious glance at her, went downstairs.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AS the the young girl entered the parrot screeched and scolded ; she had never been able to bear the disagreeable, spoiled bird from her childhood, and Papchin knew it well.

"Be good, my darling, my pet!" coaxed the old lady. She gave the bird a biscuit, and caressed him ; then leisurely and deliberately she removed the hood from her lace cap, took her cloak from her shoulders, and carefully laid them together. Margarete turned now red, now pale with inward uneasiness and agitation ; she bit her lips, but not a word escaped her ; she understood this assumed composure—her grandmama was always cold and deliberate when she was inwardly moved.

"Well, I thought you had all manner of astounding communications to make to me," said the old lady finally over her shoulder to her, while she slowly closed the drawer in which she had put her cloak and hood. "Instead of which you are standing at the window looking at the market-place as if you were counting the icicles on the eaves."

"I was waiting for you to question me, grandmama," replied the young girl, gravely. "I would I were calm enough to busy myself as simply as you suggest! Every nerve in my body is quivering!"

Grandmama shrugged her shoulders. "It is your own fault, Grete! Your temerity has been punished—you had no business in the warehouse. . . . I, too, was startled

when the man suddenly asserted his unparalleled claim; but at my years one is not easily deceived. I very quickly saw the fraud, and told my son, the clever lawyer, who, strange to say, allowed himself to be duped, how it must be beforehand; the old man cannot support his claim, because he lacks all proofs. He depended upon your father's documents—but why should I tell you all this?" she interrupted herself. "You know it from the lips of your *protegé* himself—of course, in the light in which he likes to view the matter; otherwise you would not have maintained that his claims were just."

Margarete noiselessly glided over the carpet, and now, with great inward agitation, she stood before the old lady as pale as a ghost. "That those claims are perfectly just and well-founded I know from another's lips, grandmama—from those of my father," said she, in a trembling voice.

The Frau Amtsratin recoiled. At first speechless with surprise, she stared at her granddaughter with wideopen, horrified eyes. "Are you mad?" she finally gasped. "You surely do not want to prove to me things which no sensible person can believe? Your father! My God, would the reserved man, who by a single glance could distance everyone, would he have imparted such a secret to you, to such a young girl? No, my dear Grete, he was not old enough by far to have become so childish. You assume an importance at which I should have to laugh did I not regret your blindness. Would it really have been so charming to have had this cuckoo's egg in the Lamprecht nest? . . . I pray you, do not stand before me so wise and deliberate—a manner which makes my blood boil!" Angrily she walked away from the young girl several paces, with trembling fingers she tied her cap-ribbons more tightly under her chin, and wiped her brow with her pocket-handkerchief. "If you are so sure of this and champion

it so energetically," she began again after a pause, "I require you to repeat to me word for word what your father is supposed to have said."

"No, grandmama, pardon me, but I cannot do that!" replied Margarete, with tearful eyes. "A confidence is to me a sacred thing which I shall never profane. Only where it is necessary to act for him, as he can no longer do so, shall I try to carry out to the letter his last wishes. On the day of his death he intended giving my little brother the rights which were his——"

She paused; the old lady laughed contemptuously. "Your little brother!" she repeated, trembling with rage. "Have you really the effrontery to utter such a remark before your grandmother? . . . But you will not repeat a word of that which was told you, from a sense of sacred respect and piety? I will tell you why you are so particular—because you know nothing positive. You caught up a few of your father's mysterious words, but nothing definite, and now you compare these scraps with this new story, and as they seem to coincide, you feel called upon to allow your light to shine! . . . It is magnanimous, too, to enter the lists for the misjudged and the persecuted! And what cares a nature so eager for sensation if thereby a family name respected for centuries be dragged in the mire?"

"Eager for sensation?" repeated the girl, with a frown, as she proudly threw back her head. "I am certain that this abominable characteristic of the time has not affected me; this accusation I can reject. . . . And am I to believe that a man's second marriage with a virtuous girl of refinement and education can bring dishonor upon his family name?" She shook her head. "Dear grandmama, do not be angry, but you, too, are a second wife, and how highly are my grandparents respected!"

"Insolent!" burst forth the old lady. "How can you dare to compare me with any such person! You—but why am I exciting myself!" she interrupted her own speech, and drew up her small figure in order to re-establish her lost dignity. "The whole affair is but a plot for extortion, for exaction on the parents' part; there is scarcely a question of the daughter, we are paying her an undeserved compliment in this—who knows where she is?"

"She is dead, grandmama! Do not slander her in the grave!" cried Margarete, angrily. "You cannot for the sake of our family honor, for—you may deceive yourself as you will—she was, notwithstanding all this, my father's second wife!"

"Really, Grete? Well, then let me ask you, where are the documents which prove it? . . . Allowing that all was just as the people at the warehouse maintain, and as you in your incredible blindness represent—allowing that he was indeed prevented by his sudden death from openly acknowledging the secret marriage, then, say I, would not some paper referring to it in some way have been found among his documents? Nothing of this! Not the slightest memorandum in his own hand, leaving out of the question legally attested proofs. But I will go still farther. I will myself assume that the documents indeed existed——" She paused for a moment. "Then we must of necessity conclude that the deceased himself destroyed them, because he did not want the matter brought into publicity. And that, I think, should be sufficient to induce you to give up the mad idea that you have of being the one to execute his last wishes."

Margarete drew back as though she had trodden upon a snake. "You cannot possibly be serious, grandmama! What has my father done to you that you should ascribe to him such rascality? . . . Ah, how severely is he

punished at this moment for his hesitation, his fear of the sentence of the world, of society, the Moloch which swallows up the life's happiness of thousands! How dearly did he have to pay during his lifetime for this fatal weakness! . . . And now this ending, this terrible death, which allowed of no atonement for his fault upon earth! But I know what he intended—thank God, that I know it, that I can ward off such suspicion, such a blemish from his memory——"

"And thereby cause a scandal, eh, Grete?" completed her grandmama, mockingly. "Oh, you deluded girl! But that is the senseless idealism of today, which blindly runs against the walls and barriers, and does not ask what will be destroyed if only the false opinion, the exaggerated and sentimental contemplation of the world is victorious! . . . You may have interpreted your father's confidences as you like! I maintain that he himself desired to leave a veil over a dark event in his life. And he should have desired it, for our sake—I mean, for the sake of the Marschall family. We surely did not deserve it from him that through his fault a shadow should fall upon our stainless names, that in the town and at court people should talk about us, just now when we are on the point of entering this exclusive circle! I say, at any price, it must be seen to that not a rumor of this effort at extortion on the part of old Lenz should reach the ears of the public—the wicked world believes the worst only too readily, and whispers on even though it be clearly proven that it is mistaken; and so only one thing will do any good—money! To be sure, you will be a few thousand dollars poorer; with this sum the old swindler can go away, and return to the place whence he unfortunately came."

"And the child—the boy, who has the same rights as

Reinhold and I, what shall become of him?" cried Margarete, with glowing eyes. "Shall he go out into the world without the inheritance which is his by rights, and, in the sight of God, without the name with which he was christened? And you expect me to go through life with a lie on my conscience like that? Could I ever again look an honest person in the face if I had to feel that a large share of my fortune was stolen from another, that I had cheated a fellow-being of his valuable possessions, of his father's honored name? And this you require of me, the grandmother of her granddaughter?"

"Eccentric girl! I tell you any reasonable person who considered the honor and reputation of his family would ask that of you."

"Not Herbert!" cried the young girl, with passionate protest.

"Herbert?" reproved the Frau Amtsratin, sharply, with haughty surprise. "Are you returning to your childish ways? 'Uncle,' you meant to say!"

A sudden flush rose to Margarete's face. "Well, then—uncle!" she corrected, hastily. "He will never belong to those 'reasonable ones' who have no conscience, never, never! I know it! He shall decide——"

"God forbid! You will not undertake to talk with him about it, until——"

"Until when, mama?" suddenly asked the counsellor from his room.

The old lady started as though a sudden thunderclap had rolled over her head. "Ah, you have returned so early, Herbert?" she stammered, turning in confusion. "You came very quietly."

"Not at all. For sometime I have been standing here at the open door, but no one paid any heed to me." With these words he crossed the threshold. He looked grave,

moody, and yet it seemed to the young girl as if his eyes sparkled when they rested upon her face.

"I would at once have withdrawn," he addressed his mother, "if the passionate conversation between you and Margarete did not concern me, too—you know I have taken it upon myself to throw light on the affair."

"Even now, after you must have convinced yourself that every legal point is lacking?" asked the old lady, trembling with anger. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, for my part light the torches to illumine the disgrace —more you will not succeed in doing! You, Herbert, I cannot understand! It is evident that the papers—if they ever existed, which I doubt—have disappeared for good reasons. Did you not tell me yourself that by this reviving of the unpleasant affair you were sinning against Balduin?"

"How—a sin do you call it if I try to make good his wrong?" said her son, indignantly. "Besides, I no longer question whether the deceased destroyed the papers or not; I represent the rights of the living, who must not be cheated. I know too much already to allow darkness to enshroud this 'unpleasant affair.' Or do you perhaps think I would remain a passive colluder of a hidden fault? Margarete says——"

"Do not repeat to me her fancies!" exclaimed the Frau Amtsratin, extending both hands towards him as if to ward him off. "One knows only too well that such a girlish brain requires very little material out of which to weave a whole network of fantasies."

The counsellor turned towards the young girl. "Do not let that offend you, Margarete!" said he.

"What a comforting tone!" scoffed his mother. "Are you suddenly becoming a loving uncle—you, who never have had a trace of sympathy for Fanny's eldest born? Well and good! Combine your forces against me, I am the only one who has any judgment! You l not win me over unless I see it in black and white!"

"You will see it in black and white, mama!" said Herbert, calmly and firmly. "The books in the London church will not have been burned, too!"

"My God! Do you mean by that, uncle, that my father himself destroyed papers which were in his possession?" cried Margarete, in a sort of quiet despair. "That is not true! He did *not* do so! I shall defend him and refute

this disgraceful suspicion as long as I have breath in my body! . . . I feel convinced that no journey to London is necessary; the papers *must* be here, we must look more thoroughly."

"I can unfortunately not support you in this illusion," replied Herbert. "All the documents left by your father, even the firm's books, have been carefully gone through, not even the tiniest bit of paper escaped our eyes and hands. I searched the entire *bel-étage*, as well as all the drawers and boxes in the unused articles of furniture in the guest-rooms.'

At this moment a flush dyed the young girl's face—it was as if some sudden fear shook her frame.

"Did you say in the guest-rooms of the *bel-étage*?" she asked, eagerly. "And the rooms in the side-wing?"

The counsellor looked at her in surprise. "How should the thought have occurred to me to search there?"

"In pretty Dore's haunted room, which no human foot has entered for years!" added the Frau Amtsratin, with a mocking smile. "Now you can see ho logical are this girl's ideas."

"I saw papa enter shortly before his death," said Margarete, with apparent composure, but her voice trembled with inward agitation. "He locked himself in then."

"Let us go at once!" cried the counsellor in surprise.

She went downstairs to fetch the keys. In a few minutes she returned, and met Herbert at the door of the hall; but he was not alone, his mother, wrapped in thick, warm shawls and scarfs, hung upon his arm. "She must be there, if the treasure was found," said she, with a mocking, sidelong glance at her granddaughter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARGARETE hurried forward and unlocked the door of the room. For the first time in her life did she step upon this threshold, did she have above her head that magnificent frescoing. The air with its faint breath of withered flowers greeted her—the afternoon sun's rays gleamed through the red flowers of the threadbare but not very badly faded brocaded hanging. Over this threshold the White Lady was said to have glided, and several of the ghost-seers had, too, added the cobweblike, fiendish Frau Judith ; over this threshold, too, flitted the tiny foot with its high-heeled shoe from the state-chamber to the warehouse attic, frightening the people in the house and reawakening the story of uneasy, pretty Dore.

The Frau Amtsratin on entering shook her pocket-handkerchief. "Bah, what a dreadful atmosphere! And this accumulation of dust!" cried she indignantly, pointing to the furniture. To be sure the shimmer of the velvet of silk and the bright gilding, as well as the magnificent mirrors only glimmered partly through the whitish-gray veil of dust. "And do you mean to say that your father was here during his last hours of life, Grete? I tell you, this door has not been opened in years! . . . Well, it is not strange that you should have had all manner of visions in the corridor out there—it is indeed terrible!"

Margarete made no answer. She looked significantly at the counsellor, and pointed to a footprint which led over the dusty floor directly to the writing-desk at the window.

Herbert drew aside the curtains, and the sunshine which

was shut out entered, and with its faint golden light shone upon the exquisite mother-o'-pearl and metal arabesques on the desk. It was a magnificent piece of furniture with its inlaid surface and an immense upright top, the center of which consisted of a cupboard with doors, flanked on both sides by a number of small drawers.

The Frau Amtsratin had picked up the hem of her gown, and in evident astonishment had followed the footprints. Now craning her neck she stood behind her son and granddaughter, and could not conceal a nervous agitation.

The cupboard-key turned easily under Herbert's hand, and the door flew open. The counsellor drew back, and the old lady uttered a faint exclamation; but over Margarete's face flitted a mixture of joyful surprise and deep melancholy. "There she is!" she cried, as if relieved of anxiety and fear.

Yes, that was the beautiful female head as the syringa boughs had once formed a frame for it! That was the incomparable lily-like shimmer of the complexion which had made the girlish brow gleam so innocently; those were the deep blue, sparkling, starry eyes, above which delicate dark eyebrows arched! Only the fair braids which formerly fell upon breast and neck were lacking—the hair was gathered high above the forehead in curls, and amid the wealth of gold glittered lovely Dore's ruby stars. . . . Ah,

therefore were these gems "never again to grace a woman's head as long as he lived," so had the deceased maintained with passionate agitation on the night of that dinner-party! Yes, this lady with the rubies had been as dearly loved and mourned as was the first White Lady of the Lamprechts. Old Justus never married again, and remained to the end of his life a moody, embittered man, as had his successor the much-envied Balduin Lamprecht. . . . What could have prompted the beautiful Blanka to counterfeit so exactly her unhappy predecessor, who had made the same fatal step as herself, and had atoned for it with her young life!

A stupefying fragrance came from the cupboard; around the pictures roses were piled up, roses which as offerings had withered there. In front of the portrait, too, lay the last tiny bouquet which Margarete had seen on that afternoon in her father's hands—lovely Blanka must have liked roses and their perfume.

"Well, the picture proves nothing yet!" the Frau Amtsratin thus broke the sudden silence of surprise. "It will be as I told you, Herbert! Indeed it has only been proven that the weakling for a time fell into the coquette's net."

Without replying the counsellor pulled at one of the little drawers, but it did not yield.

"The cupboard is probably constructed like Aunt Sophie's writing-desk in the courtyard-room," said Margarete. She put her hand inside of it, and pushed a projecting button; at this pressure all the drawers on the left opened.

In the lower ones were a number of modern ornaments, together with gay ribbons, probably mementos to the bereaved husband; then, however, came a drawer filled with papers. Margarete heard the labored breathing of

her grandmama, who was now standing close behind her; the delicate face appeared over her shoulder—it was quite pale, and her eyes were fixed upon the contents of the drawer, which consisted of several packages of letters tied with a black ribbon; but upon the top lay one single envelope addressed in Balduin Lamprecht's handwriting.

"Documents relating to my second marriage!" read the counsellor aloud.

The Frau Amtsratin uttered a cry of indignation. "Is that so anyway?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

"Grandmama, have mercy!" implored Margarete.

"No mercy is necessary, Margarete," said the counsellor, with a frown. "I do not understand, mama, how it was possible for you to desire that this be not confirmed. The boy's rights would have been established without these papers, and the world would in the end have found out that a son had been born of this second marriage. These documents are of value only in this, that they prove to us that Balduin did not intend to cast a slur upon his dead wife's, his child's honor for the sake of the censure of the aristocratic world."

"I knew that!" cried Margarete, with beaming eyes. "Now I am satisfied!"

"But I am not!" said the old lady, angrily. "This scandal will embitter the last years of my life. Shame upon him who drew us into such a vexing comedy! I have sung his praises at court as much as I could. His position in society he owed to me—to me alone. How will people scoff at the 'simple Frau Marschall,' who unwittingly introduced old Lenz's son-in-law into the highest circles! I am undone for all time! I shall be nobody at court! Oh, had I never agreed to move into this house! Now all will point their fingers at it, and we, the Marschalls, live in it, and you, the highest official of the town

—I beg of you, Herbert, do not look so indifferent!" she broke off, violently. "This indifference may cost you dear! This vile affair may possibly affect you——"

"I shall know how to stand it, mama," he interpolated imperturbably. "Balduin——"

"Be silent! If you still have a spark of filial love within you, do not mention this name! I never wish to hear it again, I never wish to be reminded by so much as a sound of him who deceived and cheated us, the perjurer——"

"Hold!" cried Herbert, putting his arm around Margarete, who, pale and trembling, leaned against the table for support. His veins swelled upon his forehead. "Not a step farther, mother!" he protested, angrily, though in his voice there was a ring of pain. "Though you so selfishly, so relentlessly renounce Balduin and his orphan, I shall stand by her! I will not allow one single unkind word to be spoken which can grieve her who without this has been sufficiently grieved by the pain of parting with her loved one! . . . Nor will I have Balduin defamed any longer! Possibly he was weak, and to me his unmanly vacillation is incomprehensible; yet there are excuses for his actions. At this moment you yourself prove what storms would have raged around him had he at the right time spoken out like a man. He allowed himself to be dazzled by the temptation of becoming one of an exclusive set; step by step he suffered himself to be entangled in a network of the most unnatural contradictions, and I would say that a certain courage is necessary suddenly to appear before you, and all those who think like you, as a man who has freed himself from all your prejudices and followed the natural bent of his heart. This instance in your own family should open your eyes, and show you whither these ambiguous views, this denial of the natural, healthy human

affections must lead—to suppressed, unnerving pangs of the soul, to falsehood and deceit, and oftentimes to crime. A portion of Balduin's wrong devolves, too, upon the society of today; he alone is not to blame for the scene enacted."

As Herbert spoke his mother drew back; it seemed as though she, too, wished to widen the breach which had suddenly arisen by the contrast of opinion between mother and son. With lips tightly compressed she approached the door—there she once more turned.

"To everything you have just said I have of course no word of reply," she said, her voice trembling with anger. "I think that hitherto I have made my way successfully through the world maintaining my principles; they are the best part of me, they are my pride, with them I shall stand and fall! . . . But have a care yourself! This toying with modern Liberalism does not suit your position! . . . But what am I saying! I have too much tact to desire to give you good advice. You will probably be wise enough not to express such opinions at Prince's Court and in the presence of our respected court circle."

"I certainly do not ever discuss politics with the ladies at Prince's Court, but the duke is thoroughly familiar with my views; I have never left him in doubt with regard to them," replied the counsellor, very calmly.

She said nothing more. With a low, incredulous laugh she crossed the threshold and closed the door behind her.

During this conversation Margarete had retired to the nearest window-recess; in affright she had freed herself just before from his supporting arm. "You have quarreled with her for our sakes," she now lamented, with quivering lips.

"You must not take this so to heart," he replied, still struggling with the emotion which possessed him. "You

may rest easy!" he added, in a gentle voice. "The breach will soon be healed. My mother will think it over; she will remember that I have always been a good son to her, in spite of the fact that I maintain independent views of life." He examined the documents, and took them up. "I am going to the warehouse now," said he. "All hesitation is a sin against those old people. . . . That is a duty which all good people must envy me! But one thing more: Are you perfectly clear as to how it will be if a third person is allowed equal rights with you two 'spoiled children?' If the boy from the warehouse was suddenly to be included among those who look down from the walls of your home, and of whom you are so proud? . . . Today you sought to clear up the mystery in order to remove the stain of suspicion from your father's memory——"

"Certainly. But at the same time, too, I was struggling for my little brother's rights. He will be very welcome to me—I will receive him with open arms! My life will have new interest. I shall be able to think and care for him; I will guard him as a treasure confided to me by my father. And for such a task is life worth living!"

"Have you then so few hopes for your own young life, Margarete?"

She looked at him moodily. I have no need of your pity—one only requires that when one cannot be contented with one's lot," she replied, abruptly.

"Well, God forbid that your beautiful clay pedestal does not break into pieces beneath your feet!" A faint smile played about his lips; she did not notice it, for she was looking over her shoulder into the courtyard. "But I do not want to vex you! We have agreed so nicely today—who knows what the 'morrow' may have in store for us! Give me your hand, therefore—a *friend's* hand!"

He extended his right hand towards her, and she put hers within it passively, without the slightest pressure even of her fingertips. "Oh, how cold, how insultingly cold! . . . Well, well, an old uncle must take such treatment occasionally; for that reason does he have the advantage of the burden of years and wisdom," he added good-naturedly, releasing her hand from his clasp.

He pushed the drawers into their old place, closed the press and took the key himself. "I shall ask for the key of the room again some day," said he. "I am sure that the desk still contains much that will help us to get to the bottom of the whole affair. . . . Now do not remain any longer here, Margarete! I see that you are cold."

He left the room immediately, but Margarete did not go at once. She remained in the window-recess and looked out over the courtyard. She was not cold; the air in the room was pleasant to her throbbing temples.

Below at the fountain stood Barbe filling her brightly-scoured pails with water. As yet the superstitious old woman did not suspect that the *role* of the Lady with the Rubies was forever done with. . . . Yes, now was solved

the mystery which for years had hung darkly over the house of the Lamprechts!

Margarete glanced at the snow-laden elms in front of the weaving-house. There had once sat the little 'romp' who had the so-called 'vision' of the snow-white brow between the gay silken curtains. Now she stood there herself and knew that it was lovely Blanka, who, enshrouded in a veil, had haunted the room as the White Lady. . . . What a charm had been given out by that form, by that maiden so sweet, that even the man of mature years, the proud head of the family, was forced to her feet! . . . By his side of course the then lanky student with the rosy-cheeked, boyish face was not to be thought of. Now, to be sure, it was different, quite different! He was sought after to such an extent that even the haughty beauty, the duke's niece, was anxious to win him— Margarete started, for at that moment he crossed the courtyard and walked quickly towards the warehouse.

He waved his hand to her, Barbe turned her head; the pail slipped from her fingers, and the water streamed over the wooden cover of the fountain-basin. The old cook stood as if turned to a pillar of salt beneath the haunted window from which the human being of flesh and blood looked down upon her.

Margarete stepped back and drew the curtains. Again appeared that subdued light which tinged the walls with a crimson glow and lent the gamboling cupids on the ceiling a mysterious animation. These chubby little curly heads had at various times looked down upon two beautiful young women of the Lamprecht family as roguishly as today they peeped from amid garlands of flowers and clouds at the agitated maiden below them. . . . The dark-haired woman had here ended her dream of love, the maiden with the golden braids had begun hers in the same

place. Both were destined to die young. One year, one short year of happiness had been given them; but did not this span of time contain a whole long life of denial? The young girl clinched her fists and set her teeth—had those tormenting thoughts and sensations returned, thoughts with which she fought a mortal fight? She had boasted that her best helper was her head, and this boast must not fail her, she must keep to it, and were it to work her destruction. She now was about to assume new, serious duties—did not a faithful fulfilment of them suffice to make life better worth living? Did it require an extravagant bliss?

She stepped out into the corridor, and closed the door.

And when soon afterwards night fell, and the corridors and corners of the house grew dark, the household spirits had much to whisper about. The old generation of "Thuringian Fuggers" no longer stood alone—a stout, robust little successor stood beside the miserable, fading shoot which the old tree had sent out last; and the merchants whose portraits hung upon the walls of the dark corridor might be proud—the little fellow was really and truly one of them, for in their lifetime they, too, had been handsome, intelligent people, full of strength and spirit.

In the warehouse this hopeful heir sat upon his old grandfather's knees, beside the bed of the grandmother who was convalescing, while joy beamed in the eyes of the aged couple. Now grief and worry were ended; and although the icicles sparkled on the low roof without, and a thick pillow of snow was packed against the window-panes, within the rooms there was the refreshing breath of spring. The fire crackled in the stove, and the soft lamplight was diffused over every beloved object in the old-fashioned apartment, and for the first time the old

people were possessed by a feeling of comfort, for they had already been standing with one foot in the wide world, and did not know whither they should, in company with their rejected grandson, turn their weary steps.

In the main-building, however, the disturbance which the eventful day had called forth, was not so speedily allayed. The Frau Amtsratin had locked herself in her room, and would admit no one. The servants shook their heads in surprise at the conduct of the old lady, who had come upstairs so angry. She had given the order that the counsellor's supper be served to him alone, and after calling her Papchen an "abominable screecher," she sought her room and pushed to the bolt.

Nor did Barbe ever think she would live to see a day such as the one she just went through; she was told that she was a good-for-nothing woman, and not worthy that the sun should shine upon her. . . . An hour before she had come from the fountain horrified, and had whispered to Aunt Sophie that she had seen Fraulein Gretchen in the flesh and entirely alone at the window of the haunted room. Then she was sharply rebuked for her miserable superstition. Aunt Sophie lectured her so severely that she should never forget it as long as she had eyes in her head. . . . Oh, Barbe, what a stupid, blind old person! She had taken dear Gretchen for the Lady with the Rubies, had aroused the entire household with her screams, and had sent the rude tyrant from the counting-house to his sister—ah, and then bitter words had been spoken! . . . No, she was really unworthy that the dear Lord should allow His sun to shine upon her, and sooner would she bite off her tongue than that one word should ever again escape her about the ghost in the corridor! . . . So she sat upon the kitchen-bench and wept as if her heart would break, her apron to her eyes.

Meanwhile Margarete and Aunt Sophie were pacing up and down the sitting-room. The young girl's arm was twined about her aunt, and she had told her of the great change in the house. The room was dark ; the lighted lamp had been again sent out—no one needed to see that Aunt Sophie had been weeping ; she rarely allowed herself to exhibit such feeling. But was it not a pity that for nine whole years a man should have suffered such agony of mind? And she in her innocence had enjoyed her life, and never dreamed that roundabout her such a drama was being enacted? . . . And the child, the dear, handsome boy, had not been able to enter his father's house, to eat at his father's table—Balduin's heart must have been very heavy! . . . "Good heavens, what will not mortals endure for the sake of a little more or less gain, or to be higher or lower in the world's status?" said she, in conclusion, wiping the last trace of tears from her face. "Our Lord created them, without weapons and defence, as a peaceful race ; but they sharpen their tongues into knives and themselves gird a coat-of-mail about their hearts, that there may never be any peace on earth!"

Today the storm was as yet unheard in the office. The young "tyrant" sat behind his books and reckoned. He did not dream that his reckonings were faulty, that shortly tiny fingers would rap at the door of this office, and that the hated child from the warehouse would demand admission, a seat and a voice—by rights.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next day the Frau Amtsratin was not consoled She was visible to no one; only the housemaid could go in and out, and when at noon the counsellor returned from the office and asked for an audience, he was told that the old lady's nerves were too badly upset, that she needed perfect rest for several days. He shrugged his shoulders and made no further attempt to penetrate his mother's self-chosen exile.

In the afternoon he went down into the *bel-étage*. His horse was saddled, and he was about to ride out.

Margarete was alone in the sitting-room designed for her grandpapa, and was putting a last touch to the cozy furnishings. Late in the afternoon she was to drive to Dambach, and to return to town the next morning with the patient.

She had already seen Herbert that day. He had gone over to the warehouse very early, and had brought her morning greetings from her little brother and his grandparents, together with the comforting assurance that the excitement of the preceding day had not harmed the sick woman in the least, on the contrary she was convalescing rapidly, the doctor had told him.

He came in there to take another look around. Margarete was just putting a lovely old chess-board which had belonged to her ancestors in a corner of the room under the pipe-rack. He looked from the door into the pleasant apartment. "Ah, how cozy this is!" he exclaimed, drawing nearer. Our patient will not miss his solitary pavilion-room here! I am glad we are to have him here

finally! We will nurse him together, and faithfully attend to his comfort—are you agreed, Margarete? It shall be a beautiful, affectionate, harmonious living-together!"

She turned away, and arranged the disordered folds of the nearest portière. "I know of nothing more delightful to me than to be with grandpapa," she replied, without looking around. "But my little brother has now, too, claims upon me, and there is a question in my mind if grandpapa will become used at once to the child so that with me he can be near him. I shall, therefore, have to divide my time between them."

"Quite right," he agreed. "The matter has another side, which can be explained. Nothing is more natural than for youth to long for youth; we two old people—my good papa and I—cannot require you to sacrifice yourself for us alone. But—let me make a bargain with you—give us occasionally an evening, will you?"

She turned towards him with a faint smile, and he took up his high hat which he had laid upon the table—his unbuttoned overcoat showed his faultless full-dress suit.

He remarked her surprised glance. "Yes, I have a great deal on hand yet today," said he, explanatorily. "First of all, I have the task of informing my father of the change in the circumstances of your family, and then——" He hesitated for a moment, to add so much the more hurriedly: "You are the first to learn of it, even my mother does not know it—then I am going to Prince's Court to the betrothal!"

She turned as pale as a ghost, and involuntarily put her right hand to her heart. "Then I may now wish you joy," she stammered.

"Not yet, Margarete," he evaded, his face, too, showing signs of a deep inward emotion; but he hastily suppressed it. "Tonight, when I come to Dambach on my

way to town, you shall have an opportunity of seeing your 'uncle' happy."

He waved his hand to her and went out. Soon after she saw him ride across the market-place.

She stood at the window motionless. With hands convulsively clasped upon her breast, she stared at the bit of sky which was visible through the gray clouds above the market-place. . . . The blood coursed wildly through her veins, yet she felt as weary as if she had been struck. . . . Yes, she had come to this! Several months before the world had been too confining for her, she had laughed to scorn with her sense of freedom and of youthful joy every fetter, and today in her poor little brain reigned but one single thought, and her soul struggled helplessly with this thought. But must the world know of the wounds which seared her head and heart? Did not many go through life and carry with them to the grave secrets of which no fellow-creature ever knew? *She* too must find the strength to do this. She must school herself to look calmly into a pair of eyes which had the greatest power over her; she must bring herself to meet pleasantly a beautiful woman whom she detested, and to go and come from a home in which this woman ruled as mistress, as her high-born aunt.

Later on she descended to the sitting-room, and prepared to drive to Dambach. Aunt Sophie scolded her for not touching the coffee and the cake which the crushed Barbe had baked that morning solely for her; but the young girl scarcely heard what she said. he silently tied her hat-strings under her chin; then she put her arm around Aunt Sophie's neck; then she was possessed by a sudden weakness, by the deep, ardent yearning here, as in her childhood, to seek comfort in every trial, and to whisper in her aunt's ear all that grieved her—her faithful mentor's advice had always made her happier. But, no, that could

not be! Her aunt must not be worried by her wretchedness!

So she compressed her lips and entered the carriage. On leaving the town, she lowered the window. A soft breeze was blowing from the south and fanned her cheek with that sweet breath which melts the ice, which relieves tree and shrub of its burden of snow, and awakens wonderful emotion in all things—even in the human heart—the thaw was approaching. . . . Twilight, too, was falling; the harsh tones of the wintry daylight were merged into a soft gray, through which glimmered here and there a light from a house in the village. . . . At her right it seemed as if a chain of pearls in a golden setting lay at the foot of the old nut-trees—the windows of Prince's Court were illuminated, the betrothal tapers were burning.

She leaned back in a corner of the carriage, and only when the coachman turned from the main road into the wood leading to the factory, and Prince's Court lay behind her, did she look up, shyly and uncertainly, almost like a timid child who wishes to assure herself that some uncanny apparition has indeed disappeared.

Her grandpapa received her joyfully, and at the sound of his beloved rough voice she collected herself and tried to return his greeting as naturally as possible. The old gentleman today, too, was graver than usual. An expression of moodiness overcast his brow. He was not smoking, his favorite pipe stood unheeded in the corner, and after his granddaughter had laid aside hat and cloak, he resumed his pacing to and fro which her arrival had interrupted.

"Ah, who would have thought that, May-chafer?" he cried, pausing suddenly in front of her. "Your old grandfather has been a fool, a confiding blockhead, not to keep his eyes open better than that! Now it has come

"AH, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT, MAY-CHAFER?" HE CRIED, PAUSING IN FRONT OF HER. (P. 353.)

upon me like a thunderclap, and I stand here as if sent upon a fool's errand, have to accept the business, and say 'aye and amen' to it, as though nothing else had been expected."

She remained silent, her eyes downcast.

"Poor little girl, how miserable you look!" said he, laying his hand upon her and turning her face towards the lamp. "Well, it is no wonder; zounds, it is enough, more than enough to upset an old fellow like me! And you suppress your feelings and bear it quietly and bravely! . . . Herbert says you fought beside him like a man, a brave, courageous comrade."

She blushed and looked at him like one awakening from a dream. He was alluding to the disclosures in her family, while she had thought his vexation called forth by Herbert's betrothal. . . . She was in a sorry condition! She was possessed so entirely by the thought of what was occurring at Prince's Court, that everything else was lost sight of by the side of it.

"But listen to me, child!" he began again. "Shortly we shall be finely talked-over in our good Gotham. The gossips will have plenty to do, and I should not be surprised if they sent a crier to the market-place and had the choice morsel announced. . . . Well, it matters not! I never cared for town-talk, and the affair itself is bearable, too; one thing only I cannot forget—the cowardice, the heartlessness with which the father could deny his child, and——"

"Grandpapa!" interrupted Margarete, in a beseeching tone, laying her hand upon his lips.

"Well, well, he grumbled, pushing her small, cold fingers away, "I will be still for your sake, Gretel. I do not want to make your life a burden with unwished-for advice and good precepts; for you yourself know best that

you have much to make amends for to the little fellow who has come into your house, as well as to the poor creature, old Lenz. I should like to know how he managed *not* to let the cat out of the bag at once and to—well, to demand from the father the boy's rights! Ah, yes, he is an artist, a moonshine nature, such is his ; how could indignation enter there!"

The forman's wife had prepared an excellent supper, but Margarete could not eat. She served her grandpapa and talked animatedly, filling his pipe for him afterwards. Then she packed his books in a case and collected the things necessary for the departure on the morrow. She ran up and downstairs ; suddenly she paused at a window in the dark upper room and pressed both hands to her breast, within which her heart threatened to burst. The lighted windows of Prince's Court gleamed in the darkness of the night, and at the sight of this the remainder of the self-control which in her grandpapa's presence she had maintained by an almost superhuman effort gave way.

With a cry of anguish she flung herself upon the couch and buried her face in the cushions. Triumphantly these scenes forced themselves upon her, scenes from which she had wished to fly! She saw happy mortals in the brilliant rooms of the tiny castle, saw above all the betrothed, the blonde beauty who ignored the princely blood in her veins, and who gave up her proud name for that of a simple official for the sake of her love. And he by her side—she sprang up and fled from the room.

Below the Amtsrat was sitting in his sofa-corner behind the table. He was evidently more composed, for he was reading the paper and smoking his freshly-filled pipe.

Margarete seized her cloak. "I must go out into the fresh air for a moment, grandpapa!" she called to him from the door.

"Go, child!" said he. "The south wind is blowing, it releases Nature and her creatures from bondage, and makes amends for much harm done by that mischievous fellow from the North Pole."

She went out, past the pond, which was frozen solid and covered with snow so that it could scarcely be distinguished from the road. Lights were no longer burning in the rooms of the factory, the courtyard was deserted, and only the savage watch-dog came out of his kennel and barked as the young lady passed by.

Across the fields the warm wind was blowing, a wind which in the night gradually developed into a storm; it played roughly among the girl's uncovered locks, but at the same time it fanned her cheeks with a soft, caressing touch.

It was very dark, not a star twinkled in the firmament; the sky was clouded, and it gave promise of rain. For to be sure nature had been released from her bondage, beneficial tears were dropping from bough and branch, and removed the white shroud from the face of Mother Earth. Ah, fortunate those who could weep! But, alas, to have to look upon a life full of unutterable sadness with tearless, burning eyes!

Whither was she going? Towards the light, tne ruinous light, which singes the moth's wings and kills it! And had leaping tongues of fire flashed from the windows she could not have turned back! On, on, to death even if it must be!

She ran rather than walked along the well-trodden path which crossed the fields. The snow still cracked beneath her feet; up to this time that was the only sound which had broken the silence of the night; but now, after having crossed the main road and the pasture of Prince's Court stretched before her, the wind bore toward her some chords of music—the piano was being played. There sat the *fiancée* at the instrument—no dainty Saint Cecilia with an inspired face, but rather a Rubens-like form of sensual amplitude—her luxuriant fair hair gleamed in the candle-light, and her taper fingers glided over the keys—but no, beneath *her* fingers the instrument could not give forth such soulful tones, Heloise von Taubeneck played without feeling, as she knew. But who could it be who was performing, he had a share in the rejoicing of today—a veritable storm of jubilee and inspiration ran through the performance.

Before the north front of the castle was a brilliant stream of light. The extensive lawn, in the summer broken up by gaily-colored groups of flowers, lay there spotlessly white, one glittering expanse of snow, behind the climbing rose espalier which separated it from the gravel path close to the house-walls. This walk was almost cleared of snow, only a thin, well-trodden layer lay upon the ground.

Margarete had reached this spot without having been startled by the proximity of anyone. Now she slackened her pace, and walked under the windows. What did she want here? She scarcely knew herself—a mysterious, terrible power urged her on like the wind; she *must* go and

see, and yet she knew that the sight of the happy couple would break her heart.

In the *salon*, where stood the piano, the white shades were lowered; not a shadow of a human form stirred behind the transparent texture; they were listening, as it seemed, to the masterly execution. On the other hand, the three windows of the adjoining room near which the young girl had paused were not shaded. The candlelight streamed in a flood through the windows and upon the portraits which looked down from the wall of the room. That was the dining-room; here had the betrothal dinner taken place; two lackeys were busy clearing the table; they held the open bottles up to the light and drank what was left in the wine glasses.

The closing chords of the piece of music had long since died away, and Margarete still stood beside one of the low acacias which here and there interrupted the climbing rose espalier. The wind blew the hair back from brow and temples, and powdered her with the remains of the snow upon the withered boughs of the tree. She did not feel it. Her heart throbbed in her breast, she struggled for breath, while her burning eyes roved over all the undraped windows—the happy pair must be seen once. Oh, foolish woman, to stand without in the storm to receive a death-blow!

Suddenly a door was opened. From a dimly lighted hall a man stepped and descended the low steps, while the door was closed behind him.

For a moment the listener stood there as if paralyzed by fear. The espalier prevented her from fleeing across the lawn into the darkness of the open field, and before her lay the long gravel path brightly illuminated. There was no time, however, for consideration, she was seen, and only her fleet feet could save her from the inevitable

humiliation. So she flew like hunted game along the gravel path and across the driveway in front of the western door of the castle out into the fields.

Here the wind seized her; it drove her before it like a snowflake and rendered flight easy; but neither the wind nor her nimble feet could help her—the man's footsteps, which gave chase, came nearer and nearer. The road had become smooth and slippery, she suddenly slipped and fell upon one knee—at this moment of terror a strong arm encircled her and lifted her up.

"Mocking-bird, have I got you?" cried Herbert, twining his other arm around the breathless, trembling maiden. "Now try to get away! Never, with my consent! The 'mocking-bird,' which unintentionally has flown into my net, belongs to me by rights and in the sight of God! Is it really you, Margarete? Ah, 'she came in storm and rain!'" he recited, suppressed delight vibrating in his voice.

She strove vainly to free herself; he held her so much the tighter. "Oh, God, I wanted——"

"I know what you wanted," he interrupted her almost tearfully uttered words. "You wanted to be the first to congratulate your uncle! Therefore did you cross the fields in the storm, forgetting in your eagerness to throw a warm wrap over your madcap head, and withal you flew away and did not utter your congratulations, so we should turn back and pay our respects to Prince Albert von X. and his betrothed. But you will see that your tangled locks at this moment are not just exactly presentable."

She succeeded now in disengaging herself. "Your happiness makes you too joyous!" she cried in anger. "It is a cruel jest."

"Be calm, Margarete!" he warned, with gentle gravity, again drawing her to him and taking her resisting hand in

his left. "I am not jesting. After much consideration, Fraulein von Taubeneck has been allowed by her proud relatives to become the betrothed of Prince von X., and now it may be told that I was the go-between in this affair. The red camelia, with which I was lately decorated, was an expression of gratitude for my victorious efforts. In that, too, you are greatly mistaken. On the other hand I

must admit that in one way you were right. I am truly rejoiced! I have triumphed! Did not my happiness run voluntarily into my very arms? Yes, did you not come in storm and rain, impelled by wicked jealousy, which long since I read in your heart?—For you are and will remain the Grete whose frank, open nature cannot be injured by worldly polish. Now, deny if you can that you love me——"

"I do not deny it, Herbert!"

"Thank God, the old uncle is buried! Henceforth you are not my niece, but——"

"Your Grete," said she, in a faint voice, overpowered completely by the sudden transition from grief to bliss.

"My Grete, my betrothed!" he concluded, with the emphasis of a victor. "Now you know, too, why I refused to become your guardian."

He had placed himself so as to shield her with his tall form from the blustering wind; he now stooped and kissed her tenderly; then he took the silk muffler from his throat and fastened it carefully over her uncovered head.

They now walked quickly towards the factory; as they went he told her that from his college days he had been a friend of the young Prince von X., who was very fond of him, and attached great importance to his opinion. Six months since the prince's younger brother made the acquaintance of beautiful Heloise at her uncle's court, and had fallen in love with her. This affection was returned by her, and her uncle, the duke, had favored the same. On the other hand the princely brother opposed the union strongly, upon the grounds of the young lady's plebeian antecedents. Finally the duke had taken him, Herbert, into the secret and had put the matter into his hands, and that it was brought to a happy termination was proven by the celebration of today at Prince's Court.

"Did you hear the wonderful music?" he asked, in conclusion.

She replied in the affirmative.

"Well, that was the *fiancé* giving expression to his happiness. . . . Tomorrow our good town will be very greatly astonished at the occurrence. The strictest secrecy has been observed at both courts, and of course I guarded the secret just as scrupulously. My dear father alone knew about it. I could not have stood it had he too been a believer in the universally credited fable of my suit for Fraulein von Taubeneck's hand! . . . But I have an account to settle with you. You have accused me of being an arch villain, you have uttered the most cutting remarks about my pandering to princely favor; I was supposed to be one of those ambitious persons without any conscience, who, at the sacrifice even of the life's happiness of others, seek to reach the highest pinnacle of fame, no matter whether fitted for a responsible position or not, and many more fine things. What have you to say to that?"

"A great deal!" she replied, and had it not been night he would have seen what a charming roguish smile, a smile which on their first meeting again had surprised and attracted him, lighted up her face. "Who constantly strengthened me in the belief that Counsellor Marschall was a suitor for the hand of the duke's niece? You yourself! Who fanned the miserable flame of jealousy in a poor girlish heart, and kindled it into fire? You, only you! And although at first I could not believe that you loved truly and deeply the beautiful but terribly indifferent Heloise, it was because I respected your intellectual gifts. I was finally forced to conclude, like the rest of the wicked world, that the white hands of the duke's niece were chosen to raise you to the highest round of the ladder, to the position of a minister. . . . I shall not apologize—we

are quits! Your revenge has been ample. Only think of the poor girl whom you drove out at night in the darkness on a 'walk to Canossa!'"

He laughed softly to himself. "I could not save you that—I suffered thereby myself But it was delightful to watch you drawing nearer me step by step! Now enough of the strife! Peace, blessed peace, be between us!" He twined his arm about her, and they walked on hastily.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE next morning it was as though the good town of B—— had been startled by the sudden warlike beating of drums from its usual daily rut. The news of the betrothal at Prince's Court was passed from mouth to mouth, and that no human soul had had the least suspicion of it, that even the ladies' circles, with their undeniable monoply of combinations and discernment, had been so stone-blind made everyone angry.

Through the housemaid the alarming news was brought to Frau Amtsratin's sleeping-apartment. "Nonsense!" exclaimed the old lady, contemptuously, rising however from her bed, and in a few minutes she stood in her son's presence in her nightdress and cap.

"What nonsensical talk is this about Heloise and the Prince von X., which is being carried from house to house by the baker and butcher-women?" she asked, the knob of the door in her hand.

He rose from his chair and offered her his hand to lead her into the room, but she waved him back "Cease that!" said she, severely. "I do not intend to remain here. I simply desire to know how such a groundless report could arise."

He hesitated a moment. He was sorry that she was obliged to drain this bitter chalice to the dregs, although she herself was to blame; but he said, quietly: "Dear mama, the people speak the truth, Fraulein von Taubeneck yesterday was betrothed to Prince von X."

The door-knob slipped from her grasp—she almost fell over. "True?" she stammered, putting her hand to her

brow, as if she doubted her own reason. "Really true?" she repeated, looking at her son with sparkling eyes; then she burst into hysterical laughter and clasped her hands. "They have led you a pretty dance then!"

He maintained his composure. "I was not led, but I brought the couple together," he replied, without the least irritation, and in a few words explaining the condition of affairs.

While he spoke she turned her back upon him more and more, and bit her lower lip angrily. "And this I hear for the first time?" she asked, when he had finished, over her shoulder with quivering lips.

"Would you wish your son to betray to ladies a secret confided in him? I did all in my power to correct your mistake; I often told you that I was indifferent to Fraulein von Taubeneck, that I had no idea of binding myself without love. For all these assurances you had but a mysterious smile and shrug of the shoulders——"

"Because I saw how Heloise followed you with her eyes, and——"

He blushed like a girl. "Was it not one-sided? Can you say the same of me? Fraulein von Taubeneck is conscious of her beauty, and flirts with all. Such glances are cheap—they do not make the least impression upon me. You ought to know that this is an amusement which is allowable and certainly not considered binding. Notwithstanding, Fraulein von Taubeneck will make an excellent wife—her great equanimity is a pledge of that."

The door closed again, and the old lady, with a pale, agitated face, disappeared in her bedroom. An hour latter the housemaid hastened to the dressmaker's and to the milliner's, and the servant rummaged in the attic and dragged various trunks and boxes downstairs—the Frau Amtsratin was going to Berlin to visit her sister.

When at noon the Amtsrat arrived and ascended the stairs of the Lamprecht mansion on the arm of his son, his wife came from above in her fur cloak and hat to pay farewell visits to town. She talked everywhere of her long-cherished, ardent desire once again to hear a good opera and concerts, which desire attracted her towards Berlin. The occurrence at Prince's Court was only touched upon and treated as something known about long since, at which, of course, every loyal heart must rejoice; but in her most intimate friends' ears she whispered that she could readily understand the Prince von X.'s opposition at the outset—it

was not very pleasant to have to take into his family the daughter of a former ballet-dancer.

With her departure came several peaceful, quiet days in the old mansion; but then followed a storm which made the hearts of all the occupants quake. Reinhold had to learn of the change in the family relations. The old Amtsrat and Herbert went to work as cautiously as possible; notwithstanding all this the disclosures had the effect of a bursting bomb. Reinhold fell into a violent passion. He screamed and raged and uttered the most terrible accusations against his dead father. His passionate protest availed him nothing, he had finally to submit. But from that time he secluded himself more than ever from the family—he even ate alone in his room, lest he might chance to meet his little brother in the sitting-room, for he would never have anything to do with him, and should he live to be a hundred years old, he repeated again and again

To this remark the old family physician had only a melancholy smile—he knew best his patient's prospects for old age. He therefore required on the part of the sick man's relatives the greatest care and forbearance, which was gladly promised. Little Max never crossed his path. The doors to the warehouse were not walled up; in this way intercourse between the two houses was possible. The Amtsrat had taken the fine boy to his heart, as if he were the child of his dead daughter, and Herbert became his guardian.

As was anticipated, the disclosed secret of the Lamprecht family awakened great surprise; for some time it remained a nine days' wonder, and was discussed in the clubs, the sewing circles and the beer-gardens—the Lamprechts were indeed "finely talked about." This, however, had no effect upon the present peaceful life in grandpapa's room, in the red drawing-room. There were

daily assemblies, a small circle of people who represented deep love and affection. And upon this picture of happy contentment looked down the Lady with the Rubies, smiling and bright-eyed.

"That woman's beauty is so demoniacal and striking that one might almost fear her," said Frau Lenz one evening, turning pale, to Aunt Sophie, who sat beside her upon the sofa embroidering Margarete's initial in a napkin. A lamp stood on the chest of drawers under the picture, and from the stream of light the young woman stood out as lifelike as if her lips were about to open to join in the conversation.

"This ruinous charm must have laid hold upon my poor Blanka as she went from here out into the world," added the old woman, in a low voice. "She liked to adorn herself with the jewels which are placed in that woman's hair, and in her last delirium she was struggling with beautiful Dore, who—'wanted to take her with her.'"

The counsellor rose and pushed away the lamp, so that the form was again in semi-darkness. "I had the ruby stars in my hands today, and locked them away. They will never be seen in your hair!" said he to Margarete.

She smiled. "Do you think like Barbe?"

"Not that, but I am thinking of the 'envy of the gods.' Therefore, may the red gems for the future rest in peace."

But Barbe was saying almost at the same time below in the kitchen to the others: "I do not like the way which our boy now has to take every day through the corridor. The Lady with the Rubies had to take her babe with her to the grave; now such a handsome, robust successor in here, it may make her revengeful."

"You will have to bite off your tongue, Barbe," said the servant. "You said you would never in your life again mention the ghost."

"Pshaw, 'once is nothing!' It would be wise were the corridor to be walled up ; then who knows if the beautiful blonde will not walk beside the brunette?"

The belief in the powers of darkness will not die as long as the weak human heart loves, hopes and fears!

THE END.